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**AN EXPLORATION OF PRACTICE SURROUNDING STUDENT WRITING IN  
THE DISCIPLINES IN UK HIGHER EDUCATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVES  
OF ACADEMIC TEACHERS**

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BA Hons, MA, PGCE

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The Open University

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### **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Anne and Harry, and to the memory of my friend Wendy Lawrenson, without whose interest and encouragement I would not have embarked on the PhD.



## **Acknowledgements**

Although I am the 'sole author' of this thesis, the work of many people has made it possible. My thanks first of all go to the participants in my study who gave their time and shared their experiences generously with me. I'd like to express the warmest gratitude to my supervisors Mary Lea and Theresa Lillis, who have supported me every step of the way with encouragement, inspiration and wisdom, as well as with many hours of "shadow work" (Butterwick and Dawson, 2005) engaging with this student's writing. I'd also like to thank fellow travellers on the PhD journey: especially Lynn, Sally and Jenny, for friendship, unwavering support, good ideas, laughter and for making my time as a doctoral student much less lonely than it would otherwise have been. I also owe a great deal to the tremendous support, moral and 'in kind', I have had from friends in Bristol, especially Nicky, Anne and Helen (and the rest of the 'book club' members), Esmé and Sara. Friends further afield, especially Richard, Brigid, Jane, Katherine and Mary, have also helped to keep me going by showing an interest my work and sharing with me their belief that I could do it. I'd also like to thank Anne Florence Du Jardin for providing me with some interesting photographs relating to marketing and feedback. Above all I wish to express my love and thanks to my family, especially my partner Craig for unstinting practical and moral support, my sister Sandra for her belief in me and her wisdom when times were tough, and finally to my children Hal and Tess, for the sheer joy they bring to my life, and for helping me keep it all in perspective.

### **Abstract**

This thesis aims to contribute to our understanding of academic literacies in the UK context by exploring the practices of subject-based academic teachers around student writing through the lens of teachers' experiences. Empirical work has yielded a great deal of insight in recent years into students' experience of writing in higher education; less attention has been paid to student writing from the perspective of discipline-based teachers. This thesis aims to explore the complex lived realities of practice around student writing in the disciplines from teachers' perspectives.

The research on which the thesis is based involved a study of fourteen academics, teaching different subjects in six diverse UK universities, occupying a range of institutional roles. The study used an ethnographically informed methodology to explore individuals' practice as situated within specific disciplinary and institutional contexts. Multiple sources of data were combined to develop a 'rich picture' of practice organised around individual case studies.

In keeping with an 'academic literacies' approach, the thesis asks questions about how participants' everyday practices around student writing are bound up with and/or contest institutional practices; how their work with student writers connects with issues of identity, visibility and status, and with broader questions about the nature of contemporary higher education in the UK. Data analysis points to the ways in which established understandings of language in the academy filter into the everyday practices of academic teachers, and to the shaping of these practices in contemporary institutional contexts in a marketised higher education system. The thesis contributes to our understanding of a familiar and taken-for-granted aspect of academic life, and throws light on participants' efforts to reach beyond routine practices and carve out hospitable spaces for work with student writing. Finally, the thesis suggests some implications for academic teachers and developers and their institutions.

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## Chapter 1: Starting points: introducing the thesis

### ***1.1 The fields of inquiry and underlying assumptions of the thesis***

This thesis is located on the cusp of two disciplines. On one hand, its focus on the practices of academic teachers in UK universities means that it speaks to the concerns and preoccupations of Higher Education<sup>1</sup> pedagogy as a field of inquiry. On the other, its concern with student writing, together with its exploratory, contextual approach, places it in dialogue with research based on social practice-oriented understandings of literacy. As I set out in greater detail in Chapter 2, there is now a substantial body of research which has sprung up on the fertile marginal ground between these two broad fields of interest, often referred to as ‘academic literacies’, although this is a contested and polysemic term (Lillis and Scott, 2007). The particular contribution of this thesis is to use the lens of ethnographically-inspired ‘academic literacies’ research to focus particularly on the practices of disciplinary academic teachers themselves in their work with student writers, and thus to bring to the fore the pedagogical element of the practices which constitute academic literacy in particular contexts. With this focus, rather than positioning HE pedagogy in terms of decontextualised understandings of teaching and learning, it is possible to understand pedagogic practice as social practice, informing and informed by institutional and broader social relations and structures. At the same time, this approach enables me to extend my gaze as a writing researcher beyond students’ own practices as writers and to recognise that their academic writing

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforward sometimes abbreviated to HE.

takes shape in complex institutional and disciplinary environments in which the particular actions and attitudes of their teachers play a major part.

In bringing teaching/learning and student writing together, this thesis is based on the premise that language plays a central role in higher education and is integral to the performance of students and academic teachers. I start from the position that it is unproductive to see spoken or written language as merely, *after* the fact, enabling students to demonstrate what they have learned, or as a detachable element of their educational journey ideally covered *before* they even arrive at university. The view that language in its various forms is integral to learning in the disciplines correspondingly assumes its centrality in teaching, and as Turner argues:

Language plays a role in every discipline ... not only language-related pedagogies but also the pedagogic practices of higher education itself...are quintessentially...linguaging practices (2011: 4).

At one level, the notion that language is central to higher education has the air of a truism – who would disagree, since the term ‘academic’ often carries pejorative associations of being all about words, rather than about actions or everyday experience (Ivanič and Satchwell, 2007)<sup>2</sup>? At another level, the deep entanglement of language with thinking, theory, argument, knowledge, representation and learning is, on the contrary, routinely misunderstood and the

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<sup>2</sup> Academic (adj.) 2. “Not connected to a real situation; of theoretical interest only.” Compact Oxford English Dictionary, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2008.

role of language in the academy “underestimated, undervalued and marginalised in the institutionalised discourse of higher education” (Turner, 2011: 4).

I also begin from a position which regards language as a site of struggle, inextricably linked to social action in the form of power as well as of epistemology (Clark and Ivanič, 1997; Fairclough, 1989). Words are not neutral bearers of referential meaning, but only have meaning in relation to their use in social context, and are always value-laden (Gee, 1996). Thus, even (and perhaps particularly) terms which appear straightforward from a ‘common sense’ point of view can have contested meanings, with real social consequences depending on which/whose wordings/meanings acquire currency and prevail. An example often used in literacy research is the term “illiterate”. Another example is the coinage “the student experience” which is undergoing a (contested) semantic transformation in contemporary UK HE contexts (see 2.5.2<sup>3</sup>). Thus, I attempt to be alert to the particular meanings of at least some of the words used in this thesis to talk about student writing in higher education and to interrogate the assumptions which may lie behind their use (see 1.5).

‘Writing’ is another contested term which has recently been subject to scrutiny in the context of literacy research. The ‘written’, like spoken language, is made up of a number of semiotic modes combined polyphonically to produce meaning. A traditional view of writing highlights the verbal channel above other modes, playing down the visual and material aspects of texts. Blommaert (2011) has argued that

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<sup>3</sup> Cross-references refer to numbered sections throughout the thesis.



writing communicates along a continuum in which the verbal channel is foregrounded to different degrees in the production of meaning. In this thesis, I focus my attention mainly on the verbal end of this spectrum, and refer to 'writing' and 'the written mode' in the singular as a convenient shorthand, while acknowledging that even 'traditional' academic writing involves more than one mode in its production of meaning.

Another key premise for the thesis is that writing continues to play a dominant part in students' HE experience, and that practices around student writing continue to involve substantial investments of time and effort in the work of academic teachers. HE literacies are in flux, as the result of a number of developments. Technological advances have led to rapid changes in the ways students can and do engage with texts (McKenna and McAvinia, 2011; Lea and Jones, 2010a; Kress, 2003). These changes have been further fuelled by the context of a growing number of new hybrid and vocational disciplines at tertiary level (Lea, 2012; Lillis and Rai, 2011; Baynham, 2000). These developments have fed a burgeoning of new forms: assessed texts in many disciplines now incorporate a wider variety of modes, including the spoken word, as in oral presentations, and non-verbal visual modes such as photography (e.g. Latham and McCormack, 2007) or sketching (e.g. Coleman, forthcoming), often combined in multimodal texts such as websites, video diaries or posters (Parkin, 2009; Archer, 2006) or in multilayered genres such as the 'e-portfolio' (Goodfellow and Lea, 2007). Even where students' texts are predominantly in the written mode, there has been a huge expansion in the range of text types they can be expected to produce (Leedham, 2009).

As the spectrum widens to include genres such as reflective journals, business reports, wikis, online postings or professional case notes, writing at university has arguably become even more complex and difficult, with a bewildering range of explicit requirements, shadowed in many cases by an equally complex range of unarticulated expectations, some of which may be emergent and unclear to teachers as well as students (Lea and Jones, 2010b; Lea, 2009). Students are often asked to tackle these more ‘relevant’ genres with an eye to the traditional requirements of “essayist literacy” (Lillis, 2001), resulting in hybrid and complex texts which they may have only one chance to get right. However, traditional forms of writing, such as the essay or lab report, still hold sway in many university contexts as the ‘default’ assessment genres. The written mode is still “privileged, mediated and policed as the dominant mode in the institution” (Thesen, 2001: 133) and continues to be the main form of assessment (Lillis and Scott, 2007), so the stakes remain high for writing. Thus there are good reasons to continue to tackle the vexed issue of student writing in the academy, and to try to find new ways to explore and understand what academic teachers do with it, so that it can be renewed as a resource for academic learning. This thesis represents one such attempt.

In section 1.2 which follows, I begin by sketching out the personal journey I have made as a researcher in the production of this thesis, as part of a commitment to methodological openness and reflexivity (see 3.4.4). In staking out a reasoned space for this research, it is important to recognise that the questions it pursues are constructed through a reading of existing literature deeply influenced by the experiences and values which I as the researcher bring to the study. In section 1.3 I go on to set out the aims of the thesis. Section 1.4 explores the wording of the

thesis title in order to clarify how its terms are being used and to begin to open up some of their implications. In section 1.5 I explain some decisions made about how to represent my research in the thesis, in keeping with a view of academic writing in which the genre (here, doctoral thesis) is a resource for meaning-making rather than an empty form to be filled (English, 2011; Mitchell, 2010; Hamilton and Pitt, 2009). Finally, in section 1.6 I set out the structure of the thesis as a whole, and point the reader to the particular focus of each chapter.

## ***1.2 Personal journey: work and reading***

Why pretend...that the 'gaps' are out there, waiting to be discovered...the questions that questioners ask are composed of temporal, *personal*, disciplinary and cultural conditions. (Cintron, 1993: 392) [my emphasis].

This thesis combines a number of strands of interest which have arisen in the course of my work in a range of UK post-compulsory education settings including higher education. These fall into three main categories of experience as:

- ❖ An academic teacher supporting students to write in my disciplines.
- ❖ A writing support or 'study skills' specialist working with students and sometimes with their subject teachers.
- ❖ A staff developer in university and adult/community education settings.

These three elements of my professional history and identity, together with an interest in social perspectives on language and literacy, have combined in my

decision to conduct academic writing research which focuses on the practices of disciplinary academic teachers.

### **Personal Reflection**

#### **No. 1: Writing and Identity**

*Here, in the main text, I have chosen, as with participants in the research study which underpins the thesis (see 3.5.2), not to start from the very beginning – my personal origins in a working class family in a Northeastern city, beneficiary of state funded scholarships and grants, and eventual privileged graduate of a prestigious UK university. But this journey - involving steep social as well as intellectual learning curves – undoubtedly underpins my interest in widening participation and my sense of responsibility as a higher education teacher, and thus has played an important part in shaping this thesis. It therefore feels highly relevant to me, but I am not sure that it will be judged relevant by others, even in a section giving a personal account such as this. If I have misjudged the boundaries, and this ‘aside’ is too disruptive of this assessed genre of PhD thesis, then someone else will step in to regulate my academic writing practice.*

*[See 1.5 for an explanation of Personal Reflections in the thesis.]*

I have worked through a period of expanding higher education in the UK and of nationally driven ‘widening participation’ agendas, and much of my experience relates directly to this reconfiguration of the student population in terms of age, class, ethnicity and language background. In relation to these changes, academic writing was often a critical locus of ‘failure’ for students, preventing their full participation as successful members of a university community. Teachers and colleagues (myself included) appeared to be ‘failing’ these students. Over a twenty-year period (1986-2006) I formed a view of student writing which, sharpened stereoscopically by my dual location within and outside the disciplines,

close to both student and academic teacher experience, could be summed up thus:

- i. Learning to write academically is not easy for many students**
- ii. Helping students to write successful academic texts is not easy for many teachers.**

With regard to i, detached 'study skills' or language support provision had limited success in my experience. Students often wanted to be told 'how to' write 'properly', but telling them how did not always result in successful assignments. Academic writing requirements varied according to the discipline, department and even within a department. Students rarely seemed to feel sure about what was expected of them, whereas academic teachers often felt they had made their expectations clear. Careful feedback on written assignments seemed to go unheeded. My most successful work with student-writers happened where rare circumstances permitted more time for in-depth discussion of a student's intended meanings and personal study aims, in a productive cycle of feedback and redrafting.

I was therefore strongly drawn to work in the field of "academic literacies" which tackled some of these issues directly. For example, I found in Lea and Street (1998) corroboration of my sense of the mismatch in understandings between students and their teachers, and insight into the confusing messages students

seemed to receive about how to write in their study discipline(s). Their analysis also helped me to understand the problems encountered in various discrete or 'bolt on' academic writing interventions I had been involved in. Other writers, such as Ivanič (1998) and Lillis (2001), threw light on my positive experience of in-depth dialogue with students around their writing. For me, this literature did valuable work in bringing to the fore *students'* lived experience of academic writing, often given low priority in institutions I had worked in.

However, published work in the field of academic literacies had less to say to me as a practitioner about statement ii above: *helping students to write successful academic texts is not easy for many teachers*, although this issue had been raised e.g. by Lillis (2001). Disciplinary academic teachers' experience – for reasons I discuss in section 2.5 - was not articulated with the same depth or complexity as that of students. I therefore sensed an important empirical gap in existing work. Ivanič and Lea (2006: 7) write that the "lived experience of teaching and learning – from *both* student and tutor perspectives – is central to understanding student writing" [my emphasis]; I concur with them, and the research represented in this thesis has sprung fundamentally from a desire to add to our empirical understanding of student writing by taking fuller account of the perspectives and practices of academic teachers in the disciplines.

Central to the attraction of work in academic literacies for me as a practitioner was its ability to contribute a powerful critique of prevailing practice while avoiding the unproductive blaming of individual teachers. Pedagogies around writing are frequently present in academic literacies research as a source of difficulty for

students, but also more optimistically as having “transformative” potential (Lillis and Scott: 2007). One of the key elements of this transformative approach is an interest in eliciting the (often undervalued) perspectives of student writers and in valuing the resources they bring to meaning-making in the academy. My approach in this thesis also recognises that a “transformative interest in meaning-making” (*ibid.*: 13) legitimately encompasses the meanings teachers bring to and derive from their practices around student writing.

### **1.3 The aims of the thesis**

In broad terms, as the title indicates, my aim in this thesis is to draw on the analysis of data generated in a small-scale, ethnographically-oriented study to explore the practices of academic teachers in UK universities surrounding undergraduate writing. The research on which the thesis is based involved fourteen academic teacher participants, in a range of different UK institutions and disciplines, each of whom formed the focus of a distinct ‘case’. Through this methodology (see Chapter 3) I hope therefore to address the following overarching research question:

**What are the practices of UK HE academic teachers around student writing, seen from their perspectives in their disciplinary and institutional contexts?**

The socio-political understanding of “practice” which underpins my approach (see 1.4.2) led to further research sub-questions:

- ❖ How do such practices reflect issues of visibility, identity and status for academic teachers?
- ❖ How do these practices reflect discourses of writing and writing work within the academy, and how do they therefore intersect with debates about the nature and purpose of contemporary HE?

Finally, as a participant in higher education myself – as language specialist, disciplinary teacher and at various points as a student too – I wanted to find out whether anything could be learned from this empirical work which might usefully be applied to the work of academic teachers and of others in HE: to close the circle which began with my own experiences and dissatisfactions with practice and which led to the study and to this thesis. This led to the final research question:

- ❖ What are the implications for academic teachers, writing specialists, HE staff developers and their institutions?

### ***1.4 Exploring the wording of the thesis title***

In keeping with the constitutive view of language and the valuing of reflexivity as outlined above (see 1.1 and 1.2), it seems important at the outset to explore some of the key terms used in the title of this thesis, in order to explain how they are being used, and why.



### *1.4.1 Academic teachers*

Alongside the official nomenclature of employment in UK universities (e.g. Senior/Associate/Lecturer; academic/-related) numerous terms are available to denote those who teach disciplinary subjects in universities: (subject) lecturer, teacher, academic, fellow, tutor, and the American term ‘faculty’. In different contexts, these are all commonly drawn on in ways which emphasise particular aspects of this complex role, so for example, the word ‘academic’ tends to emphasise the research-focused element of the role, while the word ‘teacher’ is routinely used as a means of prioritising the pedagogic dimension. There are other clines at work; for example, the term ‘tutor’ is often used in the UK with connotations of personal contact between staff member and student, while the word ‘lecturer’ conjures up images of a single staff member ‘delivering’ their subject to a large roomful of students. As I show in Chapter 6, the naming of this role or group of associated roles is not a neutral question of superficial labels, but often highly contentious, inextricably linked to questions of identity and status for individuals within institutions (Clegg, 2008).

While participants in this study use a variety of different terms to talk about their working identities, in this thesis I have chosen to adopt the phrase ‘academic teacher’ as my default phrasing (see e.g. Mitchell, 2010). I do not thereby wish to suggest that all participants in the study do the ‘same’ job – in many ways, their particular roles are not directly comparable with one another. However, all of them in some way identified as people who teach, and also appeared to identify with their academic subject, e.g. as a geographer, computer scientist or historian. The phrase ‘academic teacher’ captures an important link/tension between research

and teaching, a matter of live interest in UK higher education (e.g. Robertson, 2007; Barnett, 2005) which is played out in the lived experience of individual participants in this study. I also use the phrase to distinguish the participants in this project from the language or writing specialists in their institutions, although this has the unintended effect of suggesting that language and writing are not in themselves legitimate subjects of academic inquiry. However, the perception that “language workers” (Turner, 2011) or “wordface practitioners” (Shashok, 2008)<sup>4</sup> in universities are not ‘academic’ is not infrequent, and arguably feeds into a division between ‘academics’ or ‘faculty’ on the one hand and writing developers on the other. Thus, I have chosen to use the word ‘academic’ – rather than ‘disciplinary’ or ‘subject’ - teacher, as it combines a series of related elements including notions of status, and remoteness from practical concerns, which go further than an association with a particular discipline. Occasionally I add the words “subject” or “disciplinary” or the phrase “in the disciplines” for emphasis where this seems helpful.

#### *1.4.2 Practice surrounding student writing*

Practice is a broad and complex notion, theorised in different ways in different disciplinary contexts. In this section, I consider ways in which the term is understood in the two broad fields of socioculturally-oriented literacy research and higher education pedagogy and set out briefly how the thesis brings these understandings together. In the US, sociocultural approaches to language arose in

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<sup>4</sup> Shashok uses this expression mainly to refer to editors and translators of academic published work. I have used an adapted version of this term (“textface”) – see Chapter 4.

the 1960s and 70s, beginning with work by Hymes, Gumperz and others, partly in counterpoint to structuralist linguistic approaches of the period (e.g. Chomsky). This “social turn” (Gee, 1996) quickly encompassed questions of literacy as well as of spoken language, with a number of pioneering empirical studies (e.g. Heath, 1983; Scollon and Scollon, 1981) challenging decontextualised understandings of reading and writing and crude categorisations of people and social groups as either literate or illiterate. The field of New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Baynham and Prinsloo 2009, 2001; Barton and Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1984), as it came to be known, instead viewed literacy as textually-mediated social practice, where ‘social practice’ refers to culturally learned “ways of talking, interacting, thinking, valuing and believing” (Gee, 1996: 41) as well as ways of writing and reading. Practice is an abstract concept but literacy practices are construed as being manifest in observable social events which in some way involve texts and other literacy “artefacts” (Ivanič *et al.*, 2007: 707). Any literacy event will be unique in some ways but will also exhibit patterned or habitual forms of activity which connect this event with many other similar ones: in other words, a literacy event, or particular chain of linked events, instantiates (though it may also subvert or comment on) a literacy practice (Maybin, 2000). Literacy practices are understood to be “socio-politically constructed” (Ivanič, 2004: 225), and therefore highly context-specific and shaped by power relations: hence there are many ‘literacies’, and ‘some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others’ (Baynham and Prinsloo, 2001: 84, following Barton and Hamilton, 2000). These are complex notions which continue to be the subject of critical attention (Baynham and Prinsloo, 2009); for example, Prinsloo (2011) has recently argued that it is important to theorise the relationship between particular forms of writing and particular social practices in more precise and complex ways.

Academic literacies research draws on this idea of literacy as social practice derived from NLS. Much academic literacies research centres on student writers and readers (see 2.2.3) and thus points primarily to students' literacy practices, seen in the wider contexts of pedagogic relationships, disciplines and institutions. This thesis widens the lens more explicitly to include the practices of academic teachers which relate to student writing but where students may not always be present at a particular 'event', even if their texts are. It therefore recognises that students' academic literacy practices are often embedded in complex chains of events linked by a particular text or texts, in which a number of different actors play a range of roles, as readers, writers, co-writers, proofreaders, assessors, and so on, and therefore that it is impossible to draw neat boundaries between student-writers' practices and those of other social actors such as their academic teachers. This approach belies the notion of the 'sole author', still prevalent in the contemporary academy, which tends to obscure the fact that texts often evolve through interaction between different individuals all of whom may contribute to the final shape of the text. As Gee explains:

Literacy practices are almost always fully integrated with, interwoven into, constituted part of, the very texture of wider practices that involve talk, interaction, values, and beliefs (1996: 41).

Where I use the expressions "surrounding" and "around", as I do in the title and throughout the thesis, to link academic teachers' practices and student writing, I intend to refer to this relationship in terms of these tangled and textured connections.

In contemporary HE discourses, the term ‘practice’ is also widely used to mean ‘the exercise of a profession or occupation’<sup>5</sup> in a way analogous to the long-established use of the term to describe the work of doctors and lawyers. ‘Practice’ is thus a frequent collocate of ‘academic’: the term “academic practice” is now commonplace to describe what academics do in their everyday working lives, sometimes with a focus on teaching only, in other contexts to refer to research too. ‘Practice’ also frequently collocates in HE contexts with words such as ‘good’ and ‘best’, which signal particular, prescriptive ways of approaching the nature of work in the sector and which have become part of the ‘common sense’ terminology of UK education as a whole. A parallel shift towards prescriptive understandings of academic practice has been commented on in relation to Lave and Wenger’s seminal notion of “communities of practice” (1991) which has also become part of the terminological landscape of UK HE (Gourlay, 2011a; Tusting, 2005). For example, Lea (2005) argues that Lave and Wenger’s original heuristic understanding of learning as occurring through participation, negotiation and interaction with others around a shared endeavour has more recently been taken up as an idealised educational model. She argues that it is important to remain alert to ways in which practice is or *is not* learned, and may be contested, and to the potential consequences for those on the periphery seeking membership of the community. Lea’s focus is on the nature of this contestation in relation to the experience of *students* as peripheral participants. In this thesis, I draw on a similar contested, exploratory rather than prescriptive, understanding of practice, but my focus is more particularly on academic teachers themselves as members of communities of practice, and how their practice around student writing is or *is not*

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<sup>5</sup> Compact OED, *ibid*.

shared in the context of their own positioning – whether central or peripheral - within these.

This thesis combines an interest in ‘practice’ as understood in literacies research with the notion of ‘academic practice’ as outlined above. Thus it is concerned with the web of social practice in which student writing is enmeshed, and in particular that element of such practice which involves pedagogy, in its widest sense, within academic disciplines at university.

#### *1.4.3 UK Higher Education*

In adopting the term “UK Higher Education” in the thesis title, my intention is not to suggest a monolithic system, or to suggest that claims can be made on the basis of this study about the UK system as a whole. The emphasis is on individual academic teachers within their institutional contexts, but at the same time it is important to signal that the everyday practices of individuals are to some extent shaped by broader policy and cultural contexts which go beyond their particular university or department to national level. This was borne out in data analysis (e.g. see 5.5.5). In the study I aimed to take into account variation within the national system by recruiting participants from a number of different ‘types’ of university which are part of the established landscape and discourse of higher education in the UK (see 3.5.2). Thus it seems appropriate to signal national context as an outer boundary of the study. The intention in this thesis is to use a case study approach which recognises that practice (in education, as in every domain of social life) unfolds in unique situations and that “knowledge must be contextual”

(Haggis, 2008) while enabling legitimate inferences to be made from these cases which help to understand others across UK HE.

### ***1.5 The thesis: a reader's key***

Writing a thesis is an act of identity. Kamler and Thompson use the metaphor of “suturing” (2006: 16) to describe the way in which a PhD student’s researcher identity evolves along with their doctoral text(s) from a set of experiences into a coherent narrative, negotiated through dialogue with supervisors and others. In undertaking the writing of a doctoral thesis, I am engaging in a well-established literacy practice and working to produce a text which recognisably belongs to a particular genre. On the other hand, I am also an agent: writing about research is “just as much an area of decision-making as data collection and analysis are” (Ivanič and Weldon, 1999: 188). I have chosen to signal my own agency as researcher and writer by using the first person liberally throughout the thesis.

In his discussion of the challenges facing ethnographic writing research, Cintron argues that:

Discursive practices have ideological dimensions that are worth uncovering ... behind the language of ‘Survey of the Literature’, ‘Methods’, ‘Results’, and ‘Discussion and Implications’, is an ideological ‘framework’ that shapes how and what researchers see and, thus, enables their seeing. Uncovering this framework will not free us of the ideological, for the act of uncovering is also ideological (1993: 406).

While I use slightly different wordings (e.g. “data analysis” in preference to “results”), the thesis conforms to this overall conventional shape and practice. At

the same time, I have taken the ideological decision to attempt a reflexive approach towards my textual representation of the research, to ‘uncover the framework’, as far as possible, and thus to show at least some of the ‘joins’ in the making of this text, in a manner more akin to quilting than to suturing. One author in the field of academic literacies who has made use of this approach is Lillis. For example in her book *Student Writing: Access, Regulation, Desire* (2001), Lillis uses textual markers to separate this and other personal “Connections” from the main text, thus creating a hybrid genre in which the “non-academic”, “subjective” and “personal” sit alongside and shape our interpretation of the more traditionally academic argument (see Lillis, 2011; Lea, 2009; Rai, 2009; Street, 1996). The insights offered help to underline her point that “the reasons why we engage in academic endeavour are often (always?) [sic] connected implicitly to our own experiences and desires” (Lillis, 2001: 2). This “juxtaposition” (Lillis, 2011) has several effects: one is to throw the more traditional academic style into relief as one option among several, disrupting its smooth surface and so revealing it as a construction. Another is to remind the reader that the rhetorical values associated with the academic style function to suggest a concrete “reality” and to hint at an objective ‘truth’, stylistically belying the epistemological basis of research which holds that knowledge is provisional and ‘reality’ unreachable. I have chosen to adopt an element of this approach, from time to time juxtaposing the main text with more personal reflections. In such a way, I hope to go some way towards keeping “meaning in play” (*ibid.*: 36) and acknowledging my positionality.

This thesis is written in conventional Standard English; reference to sources follows the standard patterns required. These conventions are transparent and non-negotiable in the context of a doctoral thesis in this field. However, some of



the specific conventions I adopt in the main text are not in general use, for example the use of a range of fonts to signal different types of data, and are explained in Appendix A. Transcription conventions used to represent recorded talk are given in Appendix G (also see 3.5.2).

## ***1.6 The thesis: a reader's map***

This final introductory section maps out the overall organisation of the thesis. My intention throughout has been to convey the sense of an exploratory research journey as well as a degree of mastery over particular territories of knowledge. In Chapter 2, I explore the fields of inquiry and debate from which this study partly springs. My aim is to trace the intellectual origins of this project in academic literacies research, socially-oriented work on literacy, and published work in higher education pedagogy, and to explore some of the key concepts which motivated and underpinned the present work. Secondly, I set out the 'gaps' in existing research which I address in the thesis, pointing to the particular contribution I seek to make to current understandings of academic teachers' practices around student writing. This lays the foundation for the introduction of research questions at the beginning of Chapter 3. These are followed by an account of theoretical and methodological underpinnings, again drawing from key texts in order to position this study; I then move on to discuss methodological decisions which arose, ending with a discussion of ethical issues arising during the course of the study.

Chapters 4 to 7 are the empirical core of the thesis, where I introduce and analyse data generated during the study. The intention is to move from an approach structured through individual case studies, where the priority is to document

participants' practices and to allow their voices to 'speak' to the reader (Chapter 4), to a more thematic approach in which I trace significant patterns emerging across the different case studies (Chapters 5, 6 and 7). In addition to occasional personal reflections (see 1.5 above), in two chapters I have juxtaposed the main text with brief insertions which approach data in different ways: in Chapter 4, each individual account includes a "Snip" of analysis of participants' feedback comments; in Chapter 5, a number of "Windows" have been inserted, each focused on a participant's engagement with a particular text (see 5.1). Finally, in Chapter 8, I return to focus on the research questions and summarise the ways in which the study has addressed them: this includes a discussion about implications for practice. I also evaluate the research, suggest some limitations and strengths, and point to further work which is needed in this field.

## **Chapter 2: Locating the thesis: research and debate surrounding the practice of academic teachers**

### ***2.1 Introduction***

Tracing the sources which have been drawn on in this research is not a linear or unidirectional process, but a recursive one which places existing literature in dynamic relationship to research questions and to data as it is generated and analysed. This review chapter has the character of a series of ‘snapshots’ of relevant literature, inevitably conveying a static impression which belies the fluid and contingent relationship of my research to other work, as well as the fluidity of academic ‘fields’ themselves. For example, some of the work discussed here, especially key academic literacies texts such as Lea and Street (1998), Ivanič (1998) and Lillis (2001), informed the thinking which lay behind initial research questions; subsequent early data generation triggered explorations in academic literatures in HE pedagogy, assessment and feedback and academic labour; still other texts, such as Turner (2011), were not published until after most of the data for the project had been generated. Other research resonating with my study has been published at various stages during the project (e.g. Lea and Stierer, 2011, 2009; Bailey and Garner, 2010). In the exploration which follows, I therefore aim to retain a sense of the study’s development over time, as well as to retrospectively map the territory covered. In doing so, my aim is not to suggest a definitive reading of these literatures, but rather to account for the particular journey begun in the research project represented in this thesis.

In this review, I make a distinction between empirical research which contributes to our understanding of academic teachers' practices surrounding student writing, and other forms of published work which enter into debate about these practices and how they can/should be improved, but which draw their understandings either explicitly from the authors' professional experiences, or implicitly from 'common sense' knowledge in the academic community. One of the key rationales for the thesis is that views of academic teachers' practices around student writing in the disciplines emerging in pedagogic debate are rarely based on empirical work focusing on teachers themselves, and that even in the field of academic literacies research, where there is an expressed concern to focus on "actual tutors and student-writers with their particular understandings and interests" (Lillis, 2001: 75), relatively little information has been gathered to date about 'actual' disciplinary academic teachers' lived experience of academic literacies. My aim here is both to set out what existing empirical work tells us about the practices of academic teachers around student writing and to illustrate why we need to know more about such practices from teacher perspectives in order to provide a sound empirical basis for thinking about how to develop and transform them.

As described in Chapter 1, the initial impetus for the study on which this thesis is based arose partly from my readings of research in academic literacies, which has emerged in recent years as a new and rich "third space" (Curry, 2007, following Bhaba, 1994) of inquiry at the overlapping boundaries of two broader fields of knowledge, which can be summed up broadly as 'social practice perspectives on literacy' and 'higher education pedagogy'. In section 2.2 I set out this emerging research space, articulating the intellectual origins of this doctoral project in key texts impinging on understandings of student writing in UK HE. I thus aim to locate

this thesis in my reading of key “fields of knowledge production” (Kamler and Thompson, 2006).

As also explained in section 1.2, my teacher-reader responses to the research literature in these domains included a sense that something important was missing in empirical terms when it came to the experiences of academic subject teachers themselves. I therefore go on to indicate aspects of academic teachers’ practices around student writing which have not so far been adequately addressed, thus building a rationale for my research project and for the thesis. In section 2.3 I consider academic teachers’ practice around student writing as constructed through a range of research lenses in which academic teachers appear somewhat peripherally in empirical terms, including the large sub-field of research on HE assessment and feedback. In section 2.4 I consider constructions of the academic teacher in pedagogical debates about student writing from a number of institutionally positioned viewpoints within university contexts. In section 2.5 I reflect on some possible reasons for and consequences of continued gaps in our empirical understanding of such core pedagogic practices. In section 2.6 I explore a limited amount of existing research in which academics’ literacy practices and perspectives play a more central part, in order to explain the particular contribution of this study.

The methodological focus of the study on academic teachers’ lived experience, seen in their institutional contexts, brought to the fore an understanding of practice around student writing as a form of *work*. In section 2.7 I explore some of the critical questions raised by HE researchers about the changing lived realities of

academic practice, particularly in relation to the distribution and valuing of academic work. I consider how these might apply in particular to “language work” (Turner, 2011) in HE, in order to pave the way for the exploration in this thesis of how similar issues apply to the work of disciplinary academic teachers when they engage in practice around student writing.

## **2.2 Research in academic literacies**

### *2.2.1 Students’ experience of learning in the academy*

Work in the field of HE pedagogy over the past thirty to forty years has done much to enrich our understanding of students’ experience of learning and literacy in the academy. In the 1970s pedagogical work in the US, influenced by developments in psychology, began to focus on student-centred learning across educational sectors, an influence which rapidly spread to the UK (Northedge, 2003). Within this vast endeavour, a large sub-field of research emerged on student writing at university, which received greater attention in the US than in the UK, in part because the US university system opened up to ‘non-traditional’ entrants some thirty years earlier and also as a result of the long-standing, if hotly contested, role of Composition in North American universities (Crowley, 1998). Other developments added further to the active interest in student writing in the US: research and practice in ‘Writing Across the Curriculum’ and ‘Writing in the Disciplines’ (Russell *et al.*, 2009; Monroe ed., 2002; Bazerman, 1988) emphasised writing’s inseparability from the construction of knowledge in the disciplines and professions.

In the UK, a body of empirical research focusing on students' experience of learning in higher education began to emerge in the 1980s. An influential strand of this research was based on phenomenographic studies carried out in northern Europe from the 1970s onwards (Entwistle, 1997a; Marton *et al.*, 1997). In this approach, a solution to the problem of student (and so, of teachers') 'failure' was sought through an understanding of student learning in terms of hierarchically categorised "approaches to" learning, summarised in the "powerful and simple idea" (Entwistle, 1997b: 214) of "deep" and "surface". The second stage of this transformation was to develop teaching in order to provide immediate environments (teaching methods, assessment tasks) which would encourage deep approaches. Empirical work in the UK and Australia focusing on academic teachers (e.g. Prosser and Trigwell, 1997; Trigwell and Prosser, 1996) added momentum to the application of phenomenographic insights.

These developments coincided with the expansion of academic development activity in the UK and the publication of professional development guides such as Ramsden (1992) and Knight (1992). One key purpose of these guides was to professionalise academics as teachers: for example, Laurillard's *Rethinking University Teaching*: "starts from the premise that university teachers must take the main responsibility for what and how their students learn" (2003: 1-2). These authors challenged taken-for-granted academic pedagogic practices such as the lecture and rejected the 'sink or swim' mentality they observed in many HE contexts. Thus a shift of focus towards student learning partly arose out of a critique of "the conventional focus upon the transmission of content knowledge, which largely ignored how learners themselves might make sense of and learn from pedagogical practices" (Haggis, 2006: 531). A discourse of 'student-

centredness' and a burgeoning of practice-oriented research focusing on students' experience arose to challenge this pedagogic *status quo*. As Northedge writes: "The original exponents of student-centred teaching did great service in exposing deep faults in traditional university teaching and introduced important shifts in orientation" (2003: 170).

Another factor prompting this re-evaluation of HE pedagogy in the UK and elsewhere was the move towards a climate of accountability to government and others, and pressure to use more visible evaluation and more overt measures of performance (Ball, 2003; Entwistle, 1997b). The removal in 1992 of the university/polytechnic divide in the UK and the birth of the 'new' universities, increasing student numbers from the late 1980s onwards, and the enactment of 'widening participation' agendas, resulting in greater student diversity, have been frequently cited as justification for (and context of) student-focused research (e.g. Ivanič and Lea, 2006; Lillis, 2001; Lea and Stierer, 2000; Ramsden, 1992). Student writing was not particularly emphasised in phenomenographic studies: a notable exception working within this tradition was Hounsell (1984) whose work addressed students' writing as a key part of their academic learning.

### *2.2.2 Social practice accounts of the experience of literacy*

In parallel with unfolding developments in student learning research, a different tradition had begun to highlight ordinary people's lived experiences of literacy and literacy learning within and outside formal educational settings, starting from a fundamentally sociocultural and contested view of language and literacy. Baynham and Prinsloo characterise this field of New Literacy Studies (NLS) as "based on



the premise that literacy practices are always and already embedded in particular social forms of activity” and that they are “shaped by both institutionalised and informal relations of power” (2001: 83-4). This field is also characterised by research methodologies associated with anthropology, especially ethnography, entailing detailed investigation of everyday practices in situ, and of the perspectives of readers and writers themselves (e.g. Brandt, 2001; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Prinsloo and Breier, 1996). Street’s empirical investigation of community literacy practices in Iran led him to develop the notions of “autonomous” and “ideological” models of literacy (1984), highly influential in subsequent literacy research. The autonomous view, which Street argues is mainstream and dominant, treats literacy as a decontextualised skill, which can be transferred unproblematically from one context to another: a view, Street argues, sustained through a denial of the situated and ideological nature of literacy practices, and feeding into deficit framings which locate literacy “problems” within individuals.

***Personal Reflection No. 2: “You’ve got a problem”***

*It’s one of the moments of my teaching career which I remember most vividly, and with a quick stab of embarrassment, whenever I hear the word “problem” used about a student. As a Core Skills teacher on an Access to HE course in Inner London in the early 90s, I was giving back students’ first written assignment for the module. I had, as usual, spent considerable time writing feedback and thought I had done a good job. To one student, I glossed my written comments with what at the time was a ‘throw-away’ remark: “you’ve got a problem with spelling”. At the time I thought little of it – only to find myself summoned to my manager’s office, my words repeated back to me, and asked to apologise to the student. It was utterly humiliating, but one of the most important professional lessons I ever learned. If it weren’t for that manager, and her passionate*

*educational politics, and her willingness to engage with and challenge me, I might never have seriously questioned a deficit perspective on writing and its damaging effects on students.*

Much work within this diverse field has highlighted the potential disjunctures between home/vernacular literacies, and the taken-for-granted language and literacy requirements in schools and universities (e.g. Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1981)<sup>6</sup>. NLS as a field is concerned with highlighting the structural nature of such disjunctures, reflecting wider social inequalities and hence, it is argued, leading to discriminatory treatment of some individuals and groups within formal education systems. Another important strand of work in NLS applies similar critical and ethnographic approaches to workplace literacies, particularly in the context of rapid technological changes, increased globalisation and the rise of the “new work order” (e.g. Brandt, 2009; Belfiore *et al.*, 2004; Gee *et al.*, 1996).

### *2.2.3 Academic literacies – bringing together the “student experience of learning” and social practice perspectives.*

In an influential article, Lea and Street (1998) reported on an ethnographically-informed research project they carried out at three different UK universities, which brought the insights and methodologies of NLS to bear on the student experience of academic writing. Building on Street’s theorising of autonomous and ideological

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<sup>6</sup> Numerous research studies have made it clear that “vernacular” practices exist abundantly within school settings, though variously regarded by teachers as a resource for or, more often, as an obstacle to learning (e.g. Maybin, 2007).

understandings of literacy, they argued that although addressing elements of context, phenomenographic research does not sufficiently theorise “institutional practices, including processes of change and the exercise of power” (*op. cit.*: 159), and does not pay sufficient attention to language and literacy practices as central to student learning. They also suggest that by treating writing as a “transparent medium of representation”, phenomenographically-based education research “fails to address the deep language, literacy and discourse issues involved in the institutional production and representation of meaning” (*ibid.*: 159). This perspective owes much to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and its pedagogical offshoot Critical Language Awareness (Clark and Ivanič, 1997; Lea, 1994; Fairclough, 1992), approaches which brought an explicitly political and transformative agenda to language study at university, school and in adult education sectors (e.g. see Gardener, 1992).

Lea and Street (*op. cit.*: 158) propose a three-part “set of lenses” for viewing the different discourses and practices which emerged in their findings and which they found in circulation in writing research:

- ❖ writing as decontextualised ‘study skills’ - associated with language ‘problems’ in individuals and groups which can be ‘fixed’.
- ❖ writing as ‘academic socialisation’ – associated with more or less explicit ‘induction’ into academic culture and genres, though with some attention paid to specific disciplinary differences.
- ❖ writing as ‘academic literacies’ – associated with epistemology, meaning-making and learning in specific disciplinary and institutional

contexts, seen as a complex social practice involving issues of power and identity for academic writers

The authors point out that each of these models “successively encapsulates the other”; thus the “academic literacies approach offers a “more encompassing understanding of the nature of student writing within institutional practices, power relations and identities” (*ibid.*: 158-9). In the paper they describe in detail a case of mutual misunderstanding between student and academic teacher, pointing to complex challenges for student writers in negotiating the diverse and tacit expectations of staff, experiences of which their teachers were barely aware.

Another influential writer who brings understandings of the student experience together with NLS and insights from CDA, is Ivanič. In *Writing and Identity* (1998) she explores in detail the experience of eight students, using multiple sources of data to build a rich picture of their sometimes difficult and confusing struggles with the often implicit demands placed on them as writers at university. Ivanič’s analysis emphasises the relative powerlessness of student writers in relation to their reader/assessors. Similarly, Lillis’ in-depth longitudinal research (2001) involving ten ‘non-traditional’ students as they moved through and beyond their studies at university opens up understandings of the “the institutional practice of mystery” (*ibid.*: 58) and of what is at stake for some students in terms of identity, success and failure, as they learn to use or decide to reject the language(s) of the academy. These key early studies (Lea and Street, 1998; Ivanič, 1998 and Lillis 2001) also involved some empirical work with tutors as well as students: a subject to which I return in section 2.3.1.

These pioneering studies were underpinned by an understanding of academic literacy as social practice, intrinsically bound to power and with unequal consequences for individuals. Like Lea and Street and Ivanič, Lillis (2001) also draws on theorisations of power derived from CDA, especially Fairclough (1989). She also uses Bourdieu's notions of habitus and of cultural capital to articulate the way in which valuable cultural knowledge and practices around academic writing are distributed unevenly within HE (Lillis, *op. cit.*: 31). Other academic literacies researchers have also emphasised the unequal power distribution inherent in pedagogic relations around academic writing. For example, Scott and Coate investigated teachers' written feedback comments for evidence that "intrinsically asymmetrical" relations of power and the "ambiguities and dilemmas that tutors negotiate...when writing feedback" (2003: 90-1) were being disguised.

Another key theme running through studies in academic literacies is an interest in students' identities as writers (e.g. Ivanič, 1998; Scott, 2000; Lillis, 2001; Rai, 2006; Boz, 2009). Literacies understood as social practice are bound up with identities in a plural sense, not least in the context of academia, where learning to use academic language in acceptable ways can entail negotiating complex disciplinary hybridities, and can also involve enormous personal challenges and conflicts, where certain identities are more prestigious, convenient or rewarding than others (Lillis, 2001; Gee, 1996). Perhaps as a consequence of a focus on deep-rooted questions of power and identity, a number of studies drawing on an academic literacies paradigm have addressed emotion as an important dimension of academic writing for students, for example Rai (2009: 346-7). These issues have been more fully explored in relation to students engaged in writing at university and academics writing for publication, than in relation to teachers'

identities as they engage with student writing. Academic literacies researchers have drawn fruitfully on the ideas of a range of social and cultural theorists; for example, Lillis (2003, 2009) uses Bakhtin's (1981) understandings of the dialogicity of language to theorise the complex addressivity of student writing.

#### *2.2.4 Practitioner responses to academic literacies: recognition and challenge*

These studies, amongst other work in academic literacies (e.g. Street, 2004; Creme, 2000; Scott, 2000), have had increasing influence amongst UK researchers in HE pedagogy and in sections of the academic development community. In the British context, academic literacies arose primarily "from predominantly teacher-researcher recognition of the limitations in much official discourse on language and literacy in a rapidly changing higher education system" (Lillis and Scott, 2007: 7). Consequently, academic literacies evoked a profound sense of recognition amongst some academic developers and writing specialists in the UK, as well as in South Africa and Australia, whose daily work had familiarised them with students' sense of academic writing as a mysterious game, and with their struggles in finding and owning a writing 'voice' while also meeting the perceived expectations of assessors (e.g. Bloxham and West, 2007; Hutchings, 2006; Thesen and Van Pletzen, 2006; Orr and Blythman, 2005; Chanock, 2000). The academic literacies perspective also provided a welcome challenge to the widespread focus on the surface features of students' texts, a source of frustration for many working to support student writing, who discerned a tendency amongst both students and academic staff to relegate language development to a form of

proofreading service (Orr and Blythman, 2000)<sup>7</sup>. Academic literacies work responded to these frustrations and countered the prevailing discourse with its epistemological view of writing, as encapsulated in the third element of Lea and Street's tripartite model (e.g. Somerville and Creme, 2005; Orr and Blythman, 2003; Baynham, 2000).

#### *2.2.5 Academic literacies as a "design frame" (Kress, 1998)*

Although an academic literacies stance is powerful as an "oppositional frame", much work in the field over the past decade has also addressed the need for a "design frame" (Kress 1998, 2000, cited in Lillis 2003: 192) "which can actively contribute to student writing pedagogy as both theory and practice". Issues of pedagogic design informed by a situated perspective on literacies are by definition less than straightforward, and not amenable to across-the-board 'solutions'. Academic literacies' concern with transformation (Lillis and Scott, 2007; see 1.2) constitutes a profound challenge to the widespread notion that students' writing "problems" are "analogous to cuts and bruises, remediable by dint of the first aid kit wielded by ...EAP<sup>8</sup> staff... study skills or academic writing developers" (Turner 2011: 31). Perhaps because of its very ambition, academic literacies research has sometimes been thought of as valuable more for its theoretical insights and powerful critique of existing practices than for its applicability to pedagogy (Wingate and Tribble, 2012; Preece, 2009). However, as Lillis and Scott (2007) point out, "application" can be understood as a "dynamic phenomenon embedded

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<sup>7</sup> This is not to suggest that proof-reading is not itself a complex and often underestimated meaning-making social practice – see Harwood et al. (2009).

<sup>8</sup> English for Academic Purposes

in – rather than separate from – research” (p. 6) and much work in academic literacies seeks to instantiate this understanding (see Lillis *et al.*, eds., forthcoming; Ganobcsik-Williams, ed., 2006; Ivanič, 2004; Lea, 2004; Lillis, 2003).

#### *2.2.6 The expanding reach of academic literacies*

Although much academic literacies research has focused primarily on the experiences of ‘non-traditional’ students, its insights are not confined to those who usually populate this category, e.g. minority ethnic, working class or mature students (e.g. Boz, 2010; Lea, 2009; Stierer, 2008). McKenna argues that one of the particular contributions of the academic literacies approach is its power to explain why “even ‘professional’ writers who move between disciplines or who become students again can find writing conventions mysterious and difficult to embrace or own” (2003: 71). At the same time, the attention paid to questions of power, identity, and social and symbolic capital by academic literacies perspectives (see 2.2.3) keeps to the fore questions of the consequences for individuals of their struggles with academic writing and thus avoids any suggestion that the structural inequalities which privilege some social groups over others are irrelevant. Lillis and Scott (2007) document the expansion of academic literacies research into other new areas of interest, for example to incorporate multimodal and digital semiotic practices in HE (see 1.1), non-university settings such as Further Education (Ivanič *et al.*, 2007) and new vocational disciplines (Coleman, 2012; Russell *et al.*, 2009; Rai 2004; Baynham, 2000).

The reach of academic literacies work has also been extended through its use in critical analyses challenging orthodoxies in HE pedagogy and practice, such as



those deriving from phenomenographic research (e.g. Haggis, 2003) and from Lave and Wenger's widely adopted notion of "communities of practice" (see 1.4.2). Mann (2008, 2000) has drawn on academic literacies, alongside critical social theory (especially that of Foucault), to inform her analysis of university students' alienation. Ashwin and Maclean (2005) draw on academic literacies alongside Freire and Bourdieu to develop a critique of the individualised focus of much HE pedagogical literature. Their argument echoes an earlier contribution by adult educators Malcolm and Zukas who argue that much HE research draws uncritically on versions of "psychological discourse" (2001: 35) which reduce the social dimension of learning to an individualistic transaction between teacher and learner, leading to deficit-based explanations of students' and teachers' difficulty and 'failure'. Malcolm and Zukas do not refer directly to academic literacies research, but their article illustrates the way in which as a field, academic literacies resonates with wider debates within HE pedagogy, by drawing attention to 'power/knowledge', to education as discursive practices, and to issues of social policy and institutional context.

### ***2.3 Academic teachers' practice around student writing in empirical research with students and teachers.***

In the study presented here, I started from a presumption that an understanding of teachers' experiences is vital if students are to learn to write in ways which will help them succeed, and which are meaningful to them (see also 1.4.2). In this section I examine what we can learn from existing published research about (subject) academic teachers' practices around student writing, taking account of studies in which academic teachers figure both alongside students and less

centrally in empirical terms. I consider how far existing research addresses the need to understand academic teachers' practices from their own perspectives.

### *2.3.1 Academic teachers in academic literacies research*

One of the seminal contributions of Lea and Street's research in the early 1990s was to provide empirical evidence of a profound "gap" in expectations and understandings around academic writing between students and their academic teachers, which has become a "remarkably constant" finding in the field (Lea, 2005: 192). This was achieved methodologically through data gathering which took into account teachers' perspectives as well as those of students. Lea and Street's work exposed the considerable "miscommunication between tutors and students" (1998: 167) in relation to the writing students were doing; for example, they found that teachers failed to recognise how advice and expectations around student writing varied enormously even within disciplines and departments. They used texts and interviews to explore the implicit framings of writing which academic teachers were using to inform their own practice (1999).

Ivanič also gathered teachers' perspectives, conducting short telephone interviews with tutors and analysing teacher feedback comments. However, her main interest in this study was in the way that the teacher is perceived by the student in the act of writing for assessment for whom: "the individual tutors are the representatives of the abstract institution" (1998: 245) – the teacher's main significance is that she embodies, in some sense, the university that the student must "invent" (Bartholomae, 1985). Lillis's study was in part aimed at countering the "denial of real participants – that is, actual tutors and student-writers" which she argues is

“closely bound up with essayist literacy” (2001: 75). Lillis’ detailed longitudinal methodology achieves the goal of bringing her close to “actual” student-writers and their perspectives: however, as with Ivanič’s study, although tutors are present, they are necessarily on the periphery, and we find out less about their “particular understandings and interests” (*ibid.*: 75).

More recent studies which draw explicitly on an academic literacies framework have also involved academic teachers and their perspectives. For example, Rai invited “tutors” of social work students to participate in an anonymous marking exercise, in order to provide an insight into “tutors’ perspectives and expectations of student writing” (2009: 161) which was not possible by referring to written feedback comments alone. Interestingly, however, Rai describes beginning her PhD project with research questions which explicitly addressed tutors’ identity as an “important factor in student writing” (*ibid.*: 24), but for a number of reasons this partial focus on tutors was downplayed as the study unfolded, and the students’ experience therefore assumed priority. In her study of student writing and genre, English (2011) describes incorporating interviews with academic teachers focused on their experience of setting and marking students’ written work. She blends analysis of their responses with reflections on her own experience as a subject lecturer, providing valuable insight into the “communicative landscape” of UK HE into which students writing for assessment must successfully insert themselves. English provides a useful glimpse of teachers’ “rollercoaster of experience ranging from ... delight to ... desperation” (*ibid.*: 43) as they engage with students’ texts: however, these texts and student experiences of regenerating academic essays are her primary focus.

In some studies from an academic literacies perspective, academic teachers come across as paying little heed to the affective and identity-related needs of students in relation to academic writing (e.g. Hunt 2001; Young, 2000). Ivanič *et al.* (2000) draw on the feedback comments of five “subject tutors” and four EAP teachers in order to critically explore “the messages conveyed to students” in teachers’ written feedback and the effects on “the fledgling writers in their charge” (*ibid.*: 47). They found that the overarching aim of most feedback was to justify the grade rather than developmental, and that feedback designed to engage the student in dialogue was “surprisingly rare” (*ibid.*: 57). Their interpretation of comments extends to a reading of teachers’ motivation – for example, they suggest that negative feedback is perhaps “to ensure that the students know the weaknesses of their work so that they do not challenge a relatively low grade” (*ibid.*: 55). The conclusions reached here may be partly as a result of the authors’ choice to focus on feedback “samples which include negative comments” (*ibid.*: 51); in keeping with the theoretical roots of the study in critical approaches to education, they seek to expose abuses of the power which they see as inherent in the role of academic teacher. Nevertheless, they also acknowledge that the meanings of tutor comments cannot be “read off” in a simple way from the text (*ibid.*: 55), which arguably brings into question their own analytic approach in the paper. This suggests scope for further work which connects tutors’ written comments more closely with an exploration of their intentions, attitudes, and values, as well as with the impact on students’ experience.

In her study of a basic writing classroom in a US community college, Curry (2006) is highly critical of the teacher’s practice, and focuses much of her discussion on its disastrous effects on students. However, she points out that her finding of poor

quality teaching has to be understood in relation to the teacher's working conditions as a part time casual teacher. Curry's study did not involve disciplinary academic teachers, being focused on discrete language provision, but there is a useful pointer here for the current research study. She argues for the need to understand the practices of individual teachers in institutional context: the same case can be made for the work of academic subject teachers in connection with student writing. The comparison is particularly pertinent given that an increasing proportion of undergraduate teaching in the UK, especially work with larger first and second year cohorts, entailing a heavy marking load, is done by part time academic staff, often by postgraduates (Husbands and Davies, 2000) and by staff on temporary contracts (Bryson and Barnes, 2000).

### *2.3.2 Academic teachers as presented in HE research collaborations with writing specialists*

Another type of published work which throws light on the practices of disciplinary academic teachers around student writing is that which documents collaborations between language/writing specialists and subject-specialist academic teachers, often researching the outcomes of particular teaching initiatives. Perhaps surprisingly, working alongside language practitioners does not guarantee a wholly sympathetic hearing for the academic subject staff involved. In an interesting example from the US, Fishman and McCarthy (2001) report on a collaboration in which one of the authors (Fishman) is a professor of philosophy, while the other (McCarthy) is a Compositionist (see 2.2.1 and 2.7.2); the paper incorporates both distinct points of view about their joint attempts to support a recently immigrated Indian student who, for reasons of her writing, had been obliged to sign up for and

pass Fishman's course to be able to continue as a Maths major. McCarthy concludes (though Fishman disagrees) that Fishman "had not done enough" (*ibid.*: 219) for the student and was too much influenced by an assimilationist pedagogy which "ignores the negative effects of mainstream teachers upon students who differ in culture, race and gender" (*ibid.*: 221).

In a South African context, the potentially damaging nature of unthinking practices by academics around student writing has been explored by Bharuthram and McKenna (2006), reporting on an intervention in two disciplinary areas within one university, in which "respondents" who have received brief training give feedback on students' draft assignments independently of the assessment carried out by "mainstream" academics. The authors take the view that because academics are immersed in tacit knowledge about the discourses of their disciplines, they are "often incapable of making the required literacy norms overt" (2006: 497), which they regard as "dangerous" (*ibid.*: 498) to students. Nevertheless, they conclude that in some cases, mainstream academic teachers have revised their modes of assessment to build in a drafting-responding process.

In an international collection of essays edited by Ganobcsik-Williams (2006), a number of authors report positively on research collaborations between writing specialists and disciplinary teachers in various institutional locations. For example, Murray found that although lecturers did not know about scholarship on academic writing, once introduced to it they were "very willing to use it in their teaching to improve students' writing" (2006: 125). Nevertheless, she believes that writing continues to be seen as marginal to the academic disciplines, and therefore that

only those lecturers who already have an interest in [writing] are likely to engage in personal or pedagogic development or reflect...on what they do or why (*ibid.*: 132-3).

In this volume of essays and more widely in the UK-based literature, even where disciplinary academic teachers are acknowledged to be enthusiastic about developing student writing within the disciplines, they emerge as inexperienced and a long way from being confident in such a role.

### *2.3.3 Academic teachers as presented in HE research on assessment and feedback*

A major subset of published research on academic teachers' practices around student writing focuses on questions of assessment and feedback, a key focus in HE pedagogy in recent years. Much of the work discussed in sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 above could be categorised in these terms, though with varying degrees of explicit emphasis on this particular aspect of student writing. Although the range of assessed genres, even in traditional subjects, has expanded enormously in recent years (see 1.1), a great deal of published literature on feedback focuses on 'written' assessments and on the nature of *written* feedback comments given by academic teachers and/or students' experience of receiving them (e.g. Orsmond and Merry, 2011; Walker, 2009; Poulos and Mahony, 2008; Weaver, 2006; Hyatt, 2005; Pitts, 2005; Higgins *et al.*, 2002). This may in part be because written feedback comments lend themselves relatively easily to being researched and analysed (since they are naturally recorded). Textual analysis is then often supplemented with data gathered from questionnaires, interviews or focus groups

aimed at exploring students' responses to feedback. An overarching theme emerging in this literature is students' negative experience of written feedback: they often find comments hard to interpret, unhelpful, provided too late to be of use, or insufficient (see Carless, 2006, for a useful summary).

In common with these studies, Mutch (2003) also examines "the practice of a sample of academics as represented in their words", i.e. through analysis of written feedback comments. However, drawing on Fairclough (1995), he acknowledges the limitations of this approach and acknowledges that feedback-giving

is a social practice that demands [we pay] attention not only to the text but also to the conditions of production, distribution and reception. (Mutch, 2003: 25).

Mutch is rather sympathetic to the point of view of academic teachers; he suggests that in focusing on the "modality"<sup>9</sup> of teacher feedback comment, Lea and Street's research (1998) "fails to focus on the conditions of production" and so "is likely to be received with exasperation by harassed academics" (Mutch, 2003: 36). Mutch's study also provides both strong continuity and contrast with the article by Ivanič *et al.* (2000) discussed in section 2.3.1 above, of which he is critical: both studies investigate practice through the lens of academic teachers' written comments, yet

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<sup>9</sup> Lea and Street's analysis of modality also derives in part from CDA and Fairclough; they found that feedback comments had a tendency to be "categorical...using imperatives and assertions, with little mitigation or qualification" (1998: 169)



Mutch's findings (*op. cit.*: 35) that "the practice examined" was "not, in general, simply perfunctory" are in sharp contrast to those of Ivanič *et al.* (*op. cit.*: 60) who conclude that "tutors do not always give a great deal of thought to what they are attempting to achieve" with feedback.

There have been many studies of feedback processes (e.g. Price *et al.*, 2011; Carless, 2006) as well as of feedback comments and texts. For example, Crook *et al.* explored assessment relationships between teachers and students and conclude that feedback in many HE sites is subject to "the oppressive influence of narrow process management" and that often there was "an enforced *distancing* of...tutor and student" [authors' emphasis] (2006: 111). There have also been frequent calls, based on research findings in the field, for radical change in the way in which feedback is handled in universities, while taking account of resource constraints (e.g. Carless *et al.*, 2011; Nicol, 2010; Price *et al.*, 2010; Sadler, 2010). Methodologically, a common thread running through these studies and debates is that they are set up to focus principally on the experience of feedback for students – in other words, they offer insight into the "reception" of feedback rather than the conditions of its production and distribution, to echo Mutch's use of Fairclough. Information is sometimes gathered through tutor interviews or focus groups with teachers (e.g. Orsmond and Merry, 2011; Carless, 2006), but how students view, understand and make use (or not) of feedback is the main concern.

This section has been concerned with academic teachers' practices around student writing as understood through empirical research on writing and in higher education studies involving both students and teachers. In the next section I go on

to discuss how the topic of student writing and of what academic teachers do with/about it is frequently raised as an issue of debate and dissonance in published material with a polemical, rather than an empirical, focus.

## ***2.4 Academic teachers' practice around student writing in pedagogical debate: institutionally positioned views***

Alongside research which provides some empirical basis, albeit often peripherally, for understanding academic teachers' practice around student writing, there is also an extensive literature of debate on this aspect of HE in the UK and elsewhere. In this section I briefly consider a number of strands of pedagogical debate around student writing, in order to reflect on the composite picture which emerges of this aspect of academic teachers' practice in the disciplines. Contributions to these debates may be based on the authors' experience of what academic teachers do and do not/cannot do, along with a more or less explicit focus on what they could/should be encouraged to do differently and better. Those working day-to-day directly with students, and/or with academic teachers in the disciplines, may be very well placed to offer valuable insights about practices around student writing, but it is important to problematise the views presented in terms of the authors' institutional positioning.

### ***2.4.1 Views from providers of 'discrete' writing support***

Over the past two or more decades, specialists in university language 'support', EAP, study skills and student learning development, have been building a professional base within the UK university system and within their particular

institutions, for example in writing centres and language units. These forms of discrete writing provision in the UK have benefited from a range of links with other national contexts, particularly the US, with its tradition of specialist work in academic writing, associated with the Composition element of undergraduate study, and with the established institution of the university 'Writing Center'. These links have been maintained through active collaboration and staff exchanges (e.g. Cain, 2011) and through international conferences such as 'Writing Development in Higher Education' in the UK and 'Writing Research Across Borders' begun in the US. A great deal of published work in these specialist fields has drawn on writing professionals' experience of the practices of academic teachers around student writing, seen either at first hand, or through the lens of students' reports on their experiences with academic subject staff.

Those involved in discrete provision on both sides of the Atlantic are often engaged in staking a claim to their legitimacy within their HE systems, in units or centres which they argue should continue to exist outside the disciplines. One way to achieve this is to emphasise the unique contribution that can be made by support unit or writing centre personnel, in contrast to subject-based academics or, in the US context, 'faculty'. For example, Harris makes a case for the writing tutor as a "middle person" who, because they sit "below the teacher on the academic ladder...can work effectively with students in a way that teachers can not" (1995: 27-8). She also argues that the faculty professor's role in assessment, together with pressure on faculty time, precludes the kind of interaction around academic writing which students need. In doing so, she sets up a contrast between what is possible within disciplinary teaching and the type of "essential activities students need in order to grow and mature as writers" (*ibid.*: 40): the student/teacher

communication 'gap' becomes in some ways the writing specialist's niche. Harris is speaking into a political as well as a pedagogic space, countering threats to the legitimacy of the work of writing centres in US universities. A similar sense of marginalisation has been echoed in the European context: disciplinary academic teachers often emerge in published work from the writing centre standpoint as resistant to taking language issues, and those who work with them, seriously (e.g. Blythman and Orr, 2006; papers in Björk *et al.*, 2003; see also 2.2.4 above).

I am not arguing here against the legitimacy of these representations of academic teachers. However, I do wish to highlight the unintentional 'othering' of the academic teacher in some of the literature and conference contributions associated with discrete provision, which seems to mirror the institutional 'othering' of which writing and language specialists often (perhaps rightly) complain. If the communication gap between academic subject teachers and their students is seen by writing support specialists as a space for their unique work, this may have an unintended depressive effect on expectations of academic teachers' practice around student writing. At one extreme this could be understood as helping to shape a discourse which separates disciplinary thinking, learning *and teaching* from writing, inadvertently fuelling a tendency amongst 'faculty' to regard poor writing as someone else's problem. Nevertheless, the experience of working in discrete support provision, has also led some writing developers to seek to overcome the resistance or incapacity they identify in academic teaching staff where student writing is concerned. For example, Hutchings, in the South African context, derives insights both from her experience as a writing consultant and from her research based on the experiences of students who visited the centre, as recorded by writing centre consultants. She argues that

the sorts of discussion and feedback that are available in the writing centre would be better conducted within departments and incorporated into disciplinary practices (2006: 260).

#### 2.4.2 Views from *Writing In the Disciplines*

Hutchings's "lessons from a writing centre" (*ibid.*: title) move her closer to another key positioning – in debate and practice - of writing development provision at university: that which emphasises the centrality of language to the construction of knowledge and student learning in the disciplines (Russell *et al.*, 2009; Monroe, ed., 2002; Bazerman, 1988). This emphasis on *Writing Across the Curriculum* (WAC) and *Writing In the Disciplines* (WID) – whether from an 'academic socialisation', or a more contested 'academic literacies' point of view (see 2.2.3) - entails language specialists as practitioners and researchers working collaboratively with disciplinary academic teachers, and has had increasing influence in the UK from the mid-1990s onwards (McKenna, 2003). Key to *WID* and *WAC* developments in the UK were close transatlantic collaborations, for example between the pioneering *WID* programme at Cornell University and *Thinking Writing* at Queen Mary University London (Mitchell, 2010; Mitchell and Evison, 2006).

An embedded approach to writing provision has become increasingly regarded as essential in other national contexts too. For example, reviewing the European context, Björk *et al.* (2003: 13) write that separate, "expert" academic writing provision is "nobody's expressed ideal". They comment on the adoption of the *WAC* approach by contributors to their volume such as Blythman *et al.* (2003) in

the UK, who collaborate with academic staff on curricular and teaching issues “rather ... than spend their time in endless tutoring sessions with individual students who share similar writing difficulties” (*ibid.*: 12). They argue that

what Higher Education in Europe needs is for many more teachers to gradually expand their comfort zone towards an integration of academic writing and other literacies in the curricula of their disciplines (*ibid.*:12).

While these authors share a strong commitment to working to embed writing provision within disciplinary learning, language specialists working within this paradigm frequently write about the difficulties in working with academic teachers (e.g. Boz, 2010; Hill *et al.*, 2010; Chanock, 2007; and papers in Björk *et al.*, eds., 2003). Mitchell and Evison (2006) draw on an article by Gary Day in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* to challenge what they see as the cynicism and disillusion of UK academics’ popular discourse around student writing. They acknowledge the constraining role of institutional and cultural context; nevertheless, they present academic teachers as rather too ready to buy in to the established values of HE, and to foist responsibility for tedium, disengagement and boredom around writing onto students. Thus, for those working in a WID/WAC-style paradigm, who are well placed to observe the scepticism of some regarding the place of academic writing in disciplinary teaching, academic teachers frequently fall short of hopes and expectations. Nevertheless, some published accounts of academic teachers’ practices by writing specialists in this tradition also represent them generously, as simply lacking opportunity and time rather than resistant (Wingate, 2010; Murray, 2006; Jacobs, 2005). Blythman and Orr (2006) have explicitly challenged an “us” and “them” approach to relations between writing developers and academic teaching staff. A later article by Mitchell (2010),

reflecting on ten years' experience of collaboration with disciplinary academics at a number of levels, stresses institutional constraints and places less emphasis on the unhelpful attitudes of individual lecturers than in her earlier paper with Evison.

#### 2.4.3 Views from disciplinary-specific teaching and learning communities

Another important published platform from which it is possible to view academic teachers' practice around writing is provided by disciplinary-specific pedagogic journals focusing on the HE phase. These offer a space in which academic teachers can participate in conversations as, for example, "geographers" or "medics", which offer a reflexive view of pedagogic practices from their position within the disciplines. In some of these journals, (e.g. *Computer Science Education*), student writing features relatively rarely; in others it is more regularly addressed in different ways. For example, there is a thriving pedagogically-minded discourse community in the UK centred on the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, in which student writing sometimes features; this topic also surfaces with reasonable frequency in journals such as *Medical Education*; *Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education*; *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education (AHHE)* and *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education*. On the whole, academic practices around student writing are a matter of debate in these contexts, but are not the focus of empirical work. Where contributions to these disciplinary-specific forums involve empirical research relating to student writing at all, they generally report on the impact on students of particular interventions and strategies, for example where new assessed genres, such as blogs or undergraduate peer-reviewed journal articles - are trialled (e.g. Hill *et al.*, 2011; McGuinness, 2009).

Given the disciplinary audience of such journals, one might expect an optimistic rather than a negative picture of disciplinary academic teachers' practice. However, in an interesting recent article for *AHHE*, Clughen and Connell (2012: 335) describe frankly their experience of strong lecturer "resistances" to an initiative which sought to embed writing in the Social Theory subject area. The authors theorise their experiences by drawing on psychoanalytic explanations, claiming that disciplinary staff were influenced by "a certain complex around the status of teaching as opposed to lecturing" (*ibid.*: abstract) and by unarticulated fears (misplaced, in the authors' view), for example regarding threats to academic freedom. This thesis tackles similar issues, but through an exploratory empirical approach rather than through a reflection on the 'lessons of practice', and by employing an academic literacies perspective which sees pedagogic activity as social practice and individuals' practice as embedded in discourses about writing, assessment and work in the academy, and entailing real consequences, rather than seeking psychologised explanations in their unconscious fears and motivations or 'complexes'.

In another example of work published in a disciplinary-specific pedagogic journal, *Learning and Teaching: International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences (LATISS)*, which draws on insights from writing research, particularly academic literacies, Sutton (2011) makes a strong case for placing more emphasis on the "institutional dimension of academic literacy", which he articulates through Bourdieu's critique of academic culture, based on ethnographic study of elite French institutions in the 1960s. Although Sutton concedes that "there have been significant changes in the way in which pedagogic authority is exercised...in higher education" (*ibid.*: 53) since Bourdieu and his colleagues published their



work, the article does not draw empirically on the practices of academic teachers in contemporary universities in the UK. The effect in Sutton's paper is to elide current practice with the picture painted by Bourdieu of academics who "deny their students mastery of academic language by addressing themselves to ideal students who understand what is being communicated without being told" (*ibid.*: 51). This may still often be the case, but the increasing dominance of a discourse of "student-centred" higher education (Cousin, 2010; Haggis, 2003; see also 2.2.1) points to a more complex picture of contemporary academic practice in the UK. While there is value, as Sutton argues, in ensuring that key issues of institutional power relations remain central, there is also a need to empirically explore these power relations from the ground up, as they are played out in practice in the contemporary institution.

In this section I have reviewed the ways in which our understanding of academic teachers' practices surrounding student writing at university in an important pedagogical/polemical subset of the literature has been largely based on the authors' professional experiences of academics within disciplinary communities, or on writing specialists' reflections on the 'lessons of practice'. Debates about what academic teachers do or should do in relation to student writing are therefore situated within and made visible from particular institutional positions. Systematic empirical research can therefore make a valuable additional contribution to such debates. The teacher-focused aspect of pioneering empirical work by Lea and Street (1998; 1999) has been taken up far less often in subsequent academic literacies research than the students' experience. In the next section I offer some explanations for the persistence of gaps in our research-based understanding of academic teachers' practices around student writing, and discuss what is lost as a

result, thus pointing forward to the ‘uncovered territory’ which I aim to occupy in this thesis.

## ***2.5 The lack of central focus on academic teachers’ lived experience: causes and effects***

### *2.5.1 Higher education orthodoxies and methodological habits*

Ivanič *et al.* (2000: 60) explicitly align their approach with the aim of giving voice to the student experience and of looking at feedback “from the point of view of the students on the receiving end”. The effect of their methodological choices is thus open to critical examination. A number of authors who adopt a less reflexive approach have employed a similar ‘division of data labour’, gathering information about students’ experience through interviews, diaries and texts, while confining understandings of teacher practice largely to an analysis of feedback comments on students’ work and to inferences based on students’ accounts (see 2.3.3 above).

Arguably, the context of HE pedagogical research generally in the UK – founded in part on a critique of teacher-centredness (see 2.2.1 above) - has promoted a focus on students’ lived experience in some cases at the expense of an empirical approach to the experiences and practices of teachers. A number of authors lend support to this view. Ashwin (2009) suggests that focusing on teachers themselves has been viewed as a barrier to better understanding of teaching and learning. Cousin argues that phenomenographically-based inquiry “has been responsible for decentring the academic teacher in its emphasis on student experience research”

(2010: 5). Thus, the empirical focus has generally been on finding out more about students' academic writing experiences and practices, while academic teachers' practices have often been treated as something of a "given", sufficiently familiar to researchers and their readership as to be acceptable to generalise about (Bailey, 2010), rather than to be understood in their complexity through qualitative inquiry. Clegg *et al.* (2004) have called for more HE pedagogical research "in, rather than on" education, arguing that without such an enquiring focus, there is a danger of an unhelpful "deficiency model" in academic development. These authors do not focus in particular on work around student writing, but I argue that some published work in academic development directed at this aspect of teaching is a case in point (e.g. Walker, 2009; Weaver, 2006). There is a danger that solutions are built around training individuals, with a correspondingly inadequate focus on institutional structures, for example in the form of assessment regimes, staffing arrangements and the distribution of resources. Moreover, as Ashwin argues, much empirical research on teaching and learning in HE is based on individuals' accounts in interviews, taking "the research away from a focus on *particular* TLA interactions" (2008: 155) [author's emphasis]. I would add that, where academics' practices in relation to student writing are concerned, the focus is rarely on their practices around *particular* assignments or *particular* student texts (Ivanič, 1998: 61). The methodology of the present study, through the building of case studies based on a range of data sources, sought to make the particularities of individual academic teachers' experiences the central focus.

### *2.5.2 Marketisation and the ‘student experience’*

There is another reason why the phenomenon of student writing has not been fully opened up to include teacher experience. Above I argue that pedagogic discourses in UK HE have hitherto concentrated largely on uncovering the “student experience”. However, “terms and discourses migrate from one context to another and through time they subtly shift meaning” (David and Clegg, 2008: 488). In recent years, notions of the “student experience” in HE have been derived more often from market-oriented, rather than pedagogic, discourses. The term is undergoing a form of redefinition as a sector-specific version of “the customer experience”, in which the student is positioned as consumer, and the teacher and/or institution of the university as service-provider. This shift has intensified in recent years as tuition fee regimes evolve. My intention here is not to deconstruct this new dominant understanding in detail, or to reject it outright, but to note its rise to prominence, if not yet to hegemony, and to suggest that it leaves less room for more pedagogically-based understandings of the student experience of learning (see also Goodfellow and Lea, 2007). Within such a marketised discourse, there is a danger that any notion of the “teacher experience” comes to be viewed as a less relevant area of inquiry, even where not yet extensively researched. In the next section, I review the limited existing empirical work in which academics’ experiences, practices and perspectives around writing play a central role.

## ***2.6 Academics in focus: research in which academics' perspectives are empirically central***

### *2.6.1 Academics as writers*

The foregoing discussion aimed to establish that there has been relatively little research (in comparison with work focusing on students) which positions academic teachers' practices around writing centrally and makes them/their perspectives the main object of empirical study. A number of authors have recently begun to explore academics' own writing (rather than their work with student writers) using a 'social practice' lens. Lea and Stierer's 2009 study provides a good example of research which affords a close-up view of academics' experiences of writing work, achieved through interviews which focused on particular texts. Interestingly, perhaps as a result of the research framing of "everyday" writing practices, very few participants in this study chose to discuss texts connected with student writing. Gourlay (2011a, 2011b) explored new, mid-career academics' often ambivalent feelings about academia, and found that a sense of marginalisation was often strongly associated with experiences and perceptions of themselves as readers and writers in the academy. Lillis and Curry (2010) report on a longitudinal study of non-Anglophone European academics seeking to publish in 'international' English-medium journals. Murray's work (e.g. 2012) explores the way in which academics' own writing for publication can be pushed to the margins of academic life: she suggests ways of finding dedicated time and space for academic writing, for example through writing retreats.

### 2.6.2 Academic teachers of student writers

Few studies have focused on the practices of academics teachers around their student writing from a teacher perspective. Partly to redress the balance, Gay *et al.* (1999) explicitly set out to view student writing from disciplinary teachers' perspectives, focusing on two lecturers and their work with particular students. Even though only the teachers' perspectives are documented, their account provides a useful small-scale insight into a particular example of communication breakdown between tutor and student. In the specific area of assessment and feedback, there are few studies which explore "what is going on" (Clegg *et al.*, 2004) from the academic teachers' point of view when assessing and giving feedback on students' assignments, despite calls for such an approach (see 2.3.3 above). One exception is a study reported on by Bailey and Garner which set out to investigate "the lived experiences with writing assessment feedback" (2010: 187) of forty-two lecturers in one institution, across a range of disciplines. A number of valuable insights emerge from the authors' engagement with teachers' perspectives: institutional requirements (such as standardised feedback forms) were often experienced as causing academic teachers to feel a lack of 'ownership' over their feedback practices; many expressed uncertainty about feedback's purpose and effectiveness. Their study goes some way towards addressing "an important gap in research into assessment and pedagogical practice regarding the teacher experience" (*ibid.*: 188). However, their analysis of teachers' experiences does not explicitly incorporate questions of teacher status or identity.

A recent article by Bloxham, Boyd and Orr (2011) (see also Bloxham, 2009) also addresses the need to focus more specifically on key aspects of HE from the point

of view of the practitioners as they engage with students' texts. The authors report on research using 'think aloud' protocols to explore marking from the perspective of academic teachers engaged in assessing students' essays. They show that in practice, academic teachers do not use detailed criteria for the purposes of arriving analytically at a grade, but make holistic judgments, often based on experience and on sharing assessment with peers, using assessment criteria 'post-hoc' to explain and justify the grade for students. This corroborates the findings of research on non-written HE assessments (e.g. Orr, 2007), and in other sectors (e.g. Cooksey *et al.*, 2007 in primary education). They conclude that it is important to be honest with students about the realities of assessment and to ensure that students know how criteria are being used, rather than to insist on claiming an unrealistic role for assessment criteria. Their study provides a good example of the insights which can be achieved by paying attention to the messiness of the "lived reality" of pedagogy; however, the authors focus down on grading decisions, rather than seeking to find out what was significant to participants, as in the broader, more exploratory ethnographic approach offered here.

## ***2.7 Academic teachers' practices around student writing as work.***

### *2.7.1 Academic work: changing realities*

The theoretical and methodological approaches in some studies discussed in section 2.6, especially those which adopt an academic literacies perspective (e.g. Gourlay, 2011a and b; Bailey and Garner, 2010; Lillis and Curry, 2010; Lea and Stierer, 2009), allow new dimensions of the relationship in HE between individual practice and institutional context to come into play. In particular, a focus on the

everyday writing of academics as professional practice leads Lea and Stierer to argue that “it is through writing that much important academic practice *work* is conducted” (2009: 417) [my emphasis]. They focus on academic practice as workplace literacy practices, bringing their NLS-informed research into contact with a relatively small body of scholarship concerned with the university as workplace. In this section of the chapter, I briefly explore some of the literature of academic labour which throws light on questions of work which are relevant to this study.

Universities as workplaces, and academic life as labour, are relatively new foci for HE research. In part this may be because of a sense of the relative privilege of this group of workers who enjoy “high degrees of authority, prestige and autonomy” (Lea and Stierer, *ibid.*: 420), which sometimes gives pause for thought to HE researchers interested in academic labour (e.g. Leathwood and Read, 2009: 138), particularly in the HE contexts of rich countries such as the UK. Others have viewed a lack of focus on academic work critically, as stemming from a reluctance on the part of academics to reflexively examine the “conditions of their own production” (Hey, 2001, abstract; see also Butterwick and Dawson, 2005). However, the changing conditions of academia, as HE has made the transition from elite to ‘mass’ education system, have triggered more systematic attention to academic labour in the sociological sense (Smyth *et al.*, 1995).



### **Personal Reflection No. 3: Toads**

*Thinking about academic labour reminds me of Philip Larkin's poem which begins:*

Why should I let the toad work  
Squat on my life?  
Can't I use my wit as a pitchfork  
And drive the brute off?

*Later in the poem, Larkin writes:*

Lots of folk live on their wits:  
Lecturers, lispers,  
Losers, loblolly-men, louts-  
They don't end as paupers;

*Larkin is being humorously provocative by including "lecturers" in this list of wastrels and ne'er-do-wells. Seen from his view as sub-Librarian at Queens University, Belfast in 1954, perhaps academics' lives did seem to be indulgently work-free. Although tongue in cheek, Larkin is here touching on an "ivory tower" discourse of academic life, where the university is seen as being removed from the prosaic realities of everyday life, the academic's material needs catered for in a sequestered intellectual playground of the mind. In this thesis I want to avoid glib analogies between the relatively privileged work of academia and potentially much more profoundly alienating or oppressive forms of labour. Like Larkin and other authors discussed in this section, I recognise that as work it often provides an opportunity to live on one's wits – and the sense of enjoyment, pleasure and meaningful engagement which goes with that.*

Even though the notion that the academic past was ever a 'golden age' has been robustly challenged (e.g. Collini, 2012; Lea and Stierer 2011; Clegg, 2008), that profound changes have occurred which continue to dominate working life for those in the HE sector is not in doubt (Evans, 2004; Ball, 2003). Increasing student

numbers and diversity have created huge pedagogical challenges. Far from notions of academia as a place of privileged escape, questions of academics' escalating workloads (Morley, 2003: 93-9; Hey, 2001) and a "24/7 culture of availability" (Lynch, 2010: 63) are much to the fore. Moreover, changing understandings of the connection between universities, the state and the national economy have ushered in a new "managerialist" era (Lynch, 2009; Deem and Brehony, 2005) characterised by reduced job security for many, an increase in part time work and the introduction of teaching-only tiers/contracts (Bryson and Barnes, 2000; Husbands and Davies, 2000); greater scrutiny and accountability, with the corresponding rise of performativity (Ball, 2003); widespread marketisation in the context of reduced public sector funding and tuition fees (Deem and Brehony, 2005); and an increasing requirement to meet the demands of business by supplying the newly globalised market with appropriately skilled graduates and "relevant" research (Lauder, 2010). In this pressurised climate, the values and purposes of higher education have become highly contested territory, generating a growing body of research concerned with questions of what these changes mean for academic experience and identities, and for social relations within and beyond the university. Within this emerging field, a number of researchers have begun to investigate how academics' working lives and opportunities intersect with gender, class and ethnicity.

### *2.7.2 Academic work: gendered divisions of labour*

Of particular relevance to the study represented here is a body of literature which investigates academic labour and academic working identities as gendered through questions of 'care'. For example, Leathwood and Read argue on the basis

of their research that, despite moral panics about the apparent “feminisation” of HE, academic success is still strongly predicated on an academic identity which assumes few or no responsibilities beyond work and almost unlimited time to devote to it (2009: 134-8), thus profoundly disadvantaging women, who are still subject to what Lynch has called the “care imperative” (2010). There has also been interest from HE researchers in how the “care imperative” might play out *within* the workplace, for example in gendered divisions of labour (Acker and Dillabough, 2007; Butterwick and Dawson, 2005; Hey, 2001; Acker and Feuerverger, 1996; Blackmore, 1996), and a recognition that a lack of clear boundaries between private and professional academic life and work has gendered effects, where women are particularly disadvantaged by the contradictory demands of two “greedy” institutions, the family and academia (Grummell *et al.*, 2009; Currie *et al.*, 2000). These authors draw on the lived experiences of individual women in the academy, but their analysis is at the level of institutional practices and social relations; as Acker and Feuerverger (1996: 417) put it: “it is what the university stands for, and what it rewards and what it ignores, that is at issue”. However, few of these authors refer particularly to work around student writing in their discussions, although there are occasional references in data from academic teachers to work which would fall within this category (e.g. Grummell *et al.*, 2005).

### *2.7.3 Language work in the academy*

Arguments put forward by authors interested in gendered divisions of academic labour often resonate with those made by writers focusing more particularly on the work of language and writing specialists in universities. Reflecting on the British

context, Turner (2011) adopts the phrase “language work” as a useful umbrella term for a range of different explicitly language-related activities and discourses within HE. She outlines a number of different locations, such as EAP, English Language Teaching, and study skills, in which language work might take place within a university; these have their different emphases, pedagogies and theoretical traditions but share a marginal and even stigmatised place within university study and work. Turner makes the distinction between “language work” and disciplinary activity in order to describe an actual and perceived division of labour which dominates Western academic institutions, but sees this separation as being profoundly at odds with the fundamental and central place of “languaging” in the construction of knowledge and in students’ disciplinary learning (see 1.1). As she explains, as soon as language is noticed, or attention is explicitly paid to it, it is perceived as a problem – a blemish on the perfect mirror - and thus is readily understood in terms of deficits. These deficit perceptions ‘rub off’ on those involved professionally in dealing with these ‘problems’ (Turner, 2011; Chanock, 2007; Murray, 2006). Turner notes the often gendered nature of this downgrading of language work, a topic addressed explicitly by Blythman and Orr (2006), embodied in their figure of “Mrs Mop”. In the US there has been extensive debate about the gendered politics of labour in the context of language work, particularly of Composition teaching in universities. For example, Horner (2007: 164-5) contends that the social materiality of the ‘service’ labour involved in working with student writing is easily “occluded” and acknowledges the gendered nature of such occlusion, drawing on a number of authors who have written about the feminisation of writing work in the US context (e.g. Schell, 1998; Holbrook, 1991). The main focus in these contexts of research and debate is the work done by university language and writing specialists. One contribution of the study

represented in this thesis is to explore how far these arguments might reasonably be applied to work done around student writing by disciplinary academics too.

## ***2.8 Concluding comments***

In this chapter I have set out the basis for the present study in terms of its relationship to existing work. I have explained the origin of my research questions in readings in the field of academic literacies, explaining why its combination of social practice approaches to literacy and HE pedagogical concerns answered to the interests of writing specialists and developers. I have also given an account of what published work to date has to tell us about the practices of academic teachers around student writing, and have shown that there is as yet little empirical research which takes a focused look at the practices of academic teachers which play a major role in constructing academic literacies for student writers in their disciplines. Important early research in academic literacies which applied a “social practice” lens to academic writing incorporated work with teachers to explore their experiences and perspectives around student writing. However, the field has subsequently generally focused on the lived experiences of student writers. More recently, research has been carried out which focuses on academics as writers, documenting similar struggles over identity, meaning-making and power. Academic teacher perspectives and identities with respect to their work with student writers are implicated in both of these bodies of work, but have not generally been explored in detail. As a result, the view of academic teachers’ practice around student writing which most frequently appears in published work is derived from authors’ institutionally positioned experience, or treated as a ‘given’ rather than opened up for empirical investigation. This can have unintended

effects, for example, it can result in an unhelpful representation of academic teachers as being irrationally resistant to work around student writing, or as so bound up with institutionalised pedagogic relations of power and authority that they are almost incapable of productive work with student writers.

Qualitative research into the conditions of academic labour in contemporary HE has some useful insight to offer in the context of this thesis, especially work which investigates the “lived realities” of academic work and the ways in which it is distributed. However, as yet there is little published research in this field which makes explicit reference to work with student writing. A developed debate about language work in HE, especially Composition in the US and to some extent EAP in the UK, raises relevant issues, but empirical work on how these issues affect academic teachers in the disciplines has not been done. This thesis therefore aims to contribute to this body of work, and to ‘reflexive’ empirical research into the academy as workplace.

A limited amount of existing research pays greater attention to the lived experiences of disciplinary academic teachers in relation to student writing (see 2.6.2 above). However, none of the existing studies with this focus brings to light the fine-grained detail of the practices of academic teachers around student writing in the manner attempted in the present study. For example, although Bailey and Garner drew on some “supplementary” (2010: 190) textual data in the form of institutional documentation, interviews remained the main focus, whereas the present study combines interviews with a wider range of textual, observational and other sources of information, drawing some of these elements together in the

methodology of “talk around text” (see 3.5.2). The aim in this thesis is therefore to go further towards building an ethnographic picture of pedagogy as a social practice, and move away from participants’ generalisations about their professional activities towards exploring instantiations of practice as they unfold in institutional contexts in the form of particular literacy ‘events’, such as the marking of a student’s text.

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to show that the current research project resonates with existing concerns but can also make a new contribution to our knowledge and understanding. At several points during the discussion, I have referred to the relationship between the framing of our existing knowledge of academic teachers’ practices, and the methodological approaches which have been used to produce this knowledge. In the chapter which follows, I discuss methodological questions in much greater detail.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### ***3.1 Introduction: accounting for research***

This research study was undertaken in the interpretive tradition, a common approach in recent writing research (Juzwik *et al.*, 2006). In an interpretive paradigm, metaphors for research shift from the positivist notion of the ‘discovery’ of findings towards their careful ‘construction’; data are not ‘gathered’ but ‘generated’ in the dynamic interplay between theory and empirical work in the processes of research. Hammersley describes these contrasting positions in terms of a tension between “realism” and “constructionism” in research. For the constructionist, then,

social phenomena ... are ... seen as part of a world that is constituted through sense-making practices...the task of social enquiry becomes to study those sense-making practices. (Hammersley, 2007: 691).

This research project bears out Hammersley’s description in seeking to study the sense apparently made by participants through and of what they are doing. The constructionist view is reflexive: it acknowledges that conducting and representing research are themselves sense-making practices: thus, although the researcher may seek to produce a trustworthy account, it is nevertheless understood from the outset that the outcome of the research will be just that – an account. In this chapter I set out to explain the terms on which this research account is based, as well as to set out how it aims to be trustworthy.



In section 3.2, I set out the research questions addressed in this thesis, indicating how they evolved. In section 3.3, I consider the ‘ethnographic’ methodological lens adopted, and relate this to the theoretical notion of academic literacies as social practice. I consider a number of key texts which engage with ethnography as methodology, in order to establish a rationale for the approach taken here. I also describe some key features of the study which justify its characterisation as ‘ethnographic’. In section 3.4 I explore further the epistemological basis of the study, considering the dynamic between emic and etic perspectives, familiarity and strangeness, and questions of methodological awareness and reflexivity. I then look at models of language which underpin data generation and interpretation. In section 3.5, I set out the research process in greater detail, explaining how the methodology translated into “practical research strategy” (Barton and Hamilton, 1998: 58). I then look in section 3.6 at the process of analysis, aiming to be as explicit as possible about how I have ‘made sense’ of data. In section 3.7 I discuss what is offered by the case study approach in the context of the research questions, and the trustworthiness of findings represented in the thesis. Section 3.8 addresses a range of ethical issues raised during the course of this project.

### **3.2 The research questions**

The research questions addressed in the thesis do not stand separately from and *a priori* of the research itself. They were formulated gradually during a period of reading and thinking going back earlier than the first officially registered doctoral study I undertook, and were revised in the light of further reading, early empirical

work, and data generation and analysis as the main study unfolded.<sup>10</sup> My intention here is to provide a brief rationale for the research questions addressed in the thesis, indicating how they evolved as the study progressed.

It became clear from an early stage that a potentially key contribution the study could make was to place the lived experiences and perspectives of teachers more centrally than is usual in HE and literacies research. Additionally, in keeping with an academic literacies perspective, I wanted to make institutional context part of that which is opened up for empirical investigation, rather than just treating it as 'background' (Thesen and van Pletzen, 2006). Later in the study, I decided to adopt the phrase "academic teacher" as standard, in order to encompass the pedagogic and scholarly identities which participants in the study appeared to combine in various ways (see 1.4.1). Thus the thesis explores the overarching research question:

**1. What are the practices of UK HE academic teachers around student writing, seen from their perspectives in their disciplinary and institutional contexts?**

This wording reflects the decision to focus mainly on teacher participants and their experiences (rather than those of students), and the choice of ethnographic-style research which takes into account emic perspectives. It also signals an empirical

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<sup>10</sup> See 3.5.2 for more about the stages of data generation.

and interpretive alignment with academic literacies research, framing academic teachers' pedagogic activities around student writing as situated social practice (see 1.4.2).

An understanding of literacies as social practice acknowledges that writing occurs both in the “context of [the immediate] situation” (Malinowski, 1922) and in the larger institutional contexts in which practices arise, function and acquire value. These contexts are not ideologically neutral, but “constituted in, and as sites of, discourse and power” (Lea and Street, 1998: 159). As the study progressed, issues of identity and power frequently dovetailed with one another, for example in the emergence of participants' perspectives on the (in)visibility of their practices around student writing and the status writing work attracted in their university contexts. Thus a key sub-question addressed in the thesis is:

**2. How do academic teachers' practices around student writing reflect issues of visibility, status, identity, and power within their Higher Education institutions?**

At its broadest, the notion of literacies as social practice also connects what happens at the level of individuals and their institutions with the wider “context of culture” (Malinowski, 1922). I therefore embarked on the study with an interest in exploring how the practices emerging in the study reflected broader debates about the role of universities in UK society. It became clear that individual participants' practices were mediated partly through conflicting understandings of the nature

and place of writing in the academy. Thus a further sub-question addressed by the thesis is:

**3. How do academic teachers' practices around student writing reflect discourses of writing and writing work in the academy, and how do these intersect with debates about the nature and purpose of Higher Education in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century?**

These three questions are addressed in data analysis chapters 4, 5 and 6 and in Chapter 7 which combines data analysis with broader discussion.

These questions are posed in the thesis in a way which attempts to explore, rather than to evaluate, what is found (see 3.4.3). However, for me as a teacher/researcher, from the outset it has been important to try to circulate back from the 'findings' of the study to what can be learned for practice (see 1.2). Because the research lens is explicitly wide enough to take into account institutional context, the study has implications not just for academic teachers themselves but also for those who train, manage, collaborate with and employ them. Thus, although the study did not have a specific development agenda, the thesis explores a fourth question, pedagogical in the broadest sense:

**4. What are the implications for academic teachers, writing specialists, HE staff developers and HE institutions?**

The final chapter of the thesis addresses this question in the light of insights drawn from the empirical work undertaken.

### ***3.3 Academic Literacies as social practice: the ethnographic methodological lens.***

#### *3.3.1 What do I mean by 'ethnography'?*

Hammersley writes: “there is probably not much point in trying to draw boundaries around [‘ethnography’s’] meaning, but we do need to recognise the range of variation involved, and on each occasion of use it is necessary to give some indication of how the term is being used” (2006: 3). Lillis (2008: 371-2) distinguishes between ethnography in writing research as “method” on one hand, and on the other as fully fledged “methodology” – the latter characterised by sustained engagement in participants’ “writing worlds” and the use of multiple sources and types of data. My aim in this study is to engage ethnographically at the level of methodology, in the sense used by Lillis, as well as employing typical ethnographic data creation methods.

#### *3.3.2 Sustained engagement*

Lillis makes a persuasive case for ethnography as “sustained engagement with participants over a period of time” (*ibid.*: 381-2) exemplified in her own longitudinal research (Lillis and Curry 2010; Lillis, 2001). Other ethnographers have also emphasised the need for longitudinal engagement, and like Lillis have commented on contemporary institutional, political and economic conditions which make this

type of study much less likely to attract the necessary funding (Hammersley, 2006; Jeffrey and Troman, 2004.) As a PhD researcher I was able to take some advantage of the long period of study including three years' part time to ensure that engagement with participants was not usually only a 'one-off'. However, due to limits on participants' time (rather than my own), my study uses an approach similar to that which Jeffrey and Troman call the "selective intermittent time mode" (2004: 539).

### 3.3.3 *Multiple data sources*

The other key aspect of ethnography as methodology referred to by Lillis (2008: 382) is the use of "a broad range of data in collection and analysis". She argues that "multiple data sources help to build rich descriptions and understandings of the particular material conditions in which people live and work" (*ibid.*: 372). This approach to data generation is characteristic of methodologies adopted in the fields of NLS and academic literacies, enabling researchers to connect specific instances of writing and reading with what people do and with how they understand what they do, seen in a wider institutional and social context. From the researcher's perspective, the meaning of the practices in which participants engage is found in moving back and forth between different sorts of data. As Gee *et al.* (1996: 3) put it: "texts are parts of lived, talked, enacted, value-and-belief-laden practices carried out in specific places and at specific times." The "literacy parts" (Gee, 1996: 41) of social practice do not exist, or mean anything, on their own. In this project, the functions performed by texts for the participants are thus an "open question...the thing to be ethnographically determined" (Blommaert 2007: 687). Lillis and Curry argue that

academic literacies challenges any simple distinctions between academic texts and the contexts in which they are rooted and points to the need to look in detail at how texts are generated, by whom and with what consequences (2010: 21).

I would add that, given the salience of assessment in the undergraduate context, there is a need to examine how students' academic texts are received (as well as generated), 'by whom and with what consequences' for both text producer and receiver.

Within this broad approach, academic literacies researchers have adopted lines of inquiry which can be understood as falling along a continuum in terms of the role of texts within the overall data mix. In particular, studies differ with regard to the relative importance of precisely *what* texts are generated as well as *how* they are generated. In some cases, the specific wordings of texts and how these wordings come about and are read, are of central importance analytically because textual choices carry important consequences for writer-participants (e.g. English, 2011; Lillis and Curry, 2010; Ivanič, 1998). At the other end of this spectrum, the specific choices made by text producers are less in focus, for example, in the *Literacies for Lifelong Learning* study (Ivanič *et al.*, 2007; Ivanič and Satchwell 2007). A focus on pedagogy (in a broad sense) pushes this thesis towards the less text-focused end of this continuum, since academic teachers in the study may not always be the writers - or even co-writers - of the texts under discussion, but often have the role of readers and judges of others' texts (see 3.6.4).

### **3.4 Ethnography as epistemology**

#### *3.4.1 Emic/etic: a “productive tension” (Lillis, 2008)*

Lillis (2008) gives a detailed account of the value of “talk around text”, a methodology in which the researcher is open to and values writer-insider perspectives, which “immediately foregrounds the tensions between etic (outsider, researcher-analyst) and emic (insider, writers’) perspectives”...a tension which she describes as “productive” (2008: 361). Hammersley describes this dynamic interplay as the “essence” of ethnography, and argues for research which does not abandon the tension between trying to understand people’s perspectives from the inside while also viewing them and their behaviour more distantly (2006: 11). The research project represented in this thesis – a study of academic teachers in UK HE, carried out by a researcher who also fits this description, though not a colleague in a specific sense – immediately presents particular insider/outsider dynamics (see also Bailey, 2010). As an ‘insider’ with experience of working as an academic teacher, I was able to gain a certain amount of trust, which perhaps enabled some participants to share with me, as a perceived ‘kindred spirit’, aspects of their practice which they may not otherwise have done. Moreover, as in Lea and Stierer’s research:

familiarity with the context, engaging on a day-to-day basis with many similar documents, enable[d] [me] to be sensitive, both to the documents themselves and to [my] participants’ interpretations of practices around those documents (2009: 421).

On the other hand, being an ‘outsider’ – for example, not employed by the same institution in most cases – created confidence of a different nature: participants



may have felt more at ease sharing less satisfactory aspects of their experience than they might in an institutionally defined relationship: my marginality was in this case a resource, rather than a barrier (see also Ivanič and Weldon, 1999).

Nevertheless there were methodological risks involved in finding the right balance between insider and outsider perspectives. It was important to be alert to the dangers of assuming a shared lexicon (Boz, 2010) and of making assumptions about what mattered to participants based on over-reliance on my 'insider' experience. I tried to reduce these risks by asking open and exploratory questions, and by explicitly asking participants to expand on what they meant by particular terms or phrases (see transcript of conversation with Mike in 7.3.3. for an example). There is also the problem of unwittingly steering clear of any analysis or conclusion which might prove "objectionable" to participants, to use Hammersley's word (2006: 11). I tried to mitigate this risk by maintaining an awareness of my outsider position and framing my approach to participants in a professional, as well as friendly, way.

In a study of this kind, the insider/outsider dynamic is more complex still than the above account suggests. Differences or commonalities of gender, age, status and seniority clearly played a part in generating particularly formal or informal researcher-participant dynamics. This affected data generated, for example at interviews, but also the extent to which I felt able to ask for further involvement in the project. These aspects of researcher/participant relationships were not static, but changed over time; in some cases, for example, relations became more informal as trust developed. Moreover, shifting identities and positionalities were

*deployed* by researcher and participants (Crang and Cook, 2007). For example, I worded letters of approach according to the nature of the initial contact (see Appendix B). The strategy for managing such complexity without undermining research validity was to maintain awareness of these issues throughout, and to incorporate them in data analysis (see Gunasekara, 2007). As Crang and Cook note, the ways in which a researcher can get “placed” by participants “can often provide insights into the world views of people under study” (2007: 44). This was more likely where positionings were articulated in some way (see 6.2.3 for an example).

#### *3.4.2 Making the familiar strange*

Insider/outsider dynamics are closely aligned to questions of strangeness versus familiarity often raised in connection with ethnographic research. The dangers of too much ‘familiarity’ are particularly acute in this research project, which explores routine elements of academic work which are likely to be extremely familiar to those who read and hear about this research. Moreover, I am presenting this study of practices around student writing, as a student, writing for assessment, adding a further layer of reflexivity. This situation has sometimes led me as a researcher to ask: “why do research if everyone who will read about it already has personal experience of this stuff?” The answer partly lies in the productive tension between the emic and etic perspective: the practices of disciplinary academics around student writing are so ordinary that we think “we all ‘know’ about” them (Lillis and Curry, 2010: 112) – one reason why it has received little *systematic* attention to date. The other part of the answer is that because of their very familiarity, practices around student writing in the disciplines are to some extent hidden in the

literature and in the working lives of academics, sometimes conveniently so, and can only be more fully understood if they are foregrounded through empirical research.

### *3.4.3 Ethnographic curiosity, not scrutiny*

In the case of this project, where the object of inquiry is both close to home and relatively hidden, some effort was required to see it afresh, with curious eyes: the process of research allowed this to happen, as I delved into corners and came up with a mixture of the familiar and the surprising. In using the word ‘curious’ I do not intend to suggest naivety: questions of power saturate meaning-making in research just as they do other forms of social practice (see 3.8.1). Because of the climate of quality assessment and scrutiny widespread in contemporary HE (Ball, 2003; Morley, 2003), qualitative research involving academic teachers can carry particular historically produced significance as intrusive. The aim in this study was to take the positive opportunity offered by an open-minded, exploratory methodology to consciously avoid, as far as possible, “making prior assumptions as to which practices are either appropriate or effective” (Lea and Street, 1998: 158). It was not always easy to step outside the prevailing discourses (Clegg *et al.*, 2004) or historically framed relationships between education researchers and practitioners. However, to the extent that it was possible, it has strengthened the research because it enabled me to encourage not only “the party line” (Morley, 2003: xi), but some more open, less defensive responses. I also adopted this approach because of a personal desire to do research which avoids unproductively blaming individuals or groups for ‘problems’ in academic writing (see 1.2).

#### *3.4.4 Methodological awareness and reflexivity*

As suggested in the above discussion (see also 1.5), in this research I am aiming to acknowledge “the situated and dialogical character of ethnographic knowledge itself – [and so to embrace] reflexivity” (Blommaert, 2007: 682). Elsewhere, Blommaert argues:

Ethnography attributes (and *has* to attribute) great importance to the history of what is commonly seen as ‘data’: the whole process of gathering and moulding knowledge is part of that knowledge (2006: 6) [author’s emphasis].

Although this reflexive element has not always been present in ethnographic research (Blommaert, 2007; Barton and Hamilton, 1998) it is a common thread running through literacies research conducted in recent times. In contrast, Ashwin argues that in much published work in HE pedagogy the

absence of meaningful accounts of the approach taken to data analysis serves to conceal the role that the selections of the researchers have played in generating their findings (2008: 155-6).

Academic literacies then, in prioritising methodological issues, has a valuable contribution to make to the broader published research in HE pedagogy.

#### *3.4.5 The underpinning view of language*

The ethnographic methodological approach of this study ties closely with a view of language as intrinsically social and cultural (see 1.1). Language in use – along with other semiotic resources available to human beings - is always discourse, a

way of being in the world (Gee, 1996: viii) and also a way of representing, thinking about or knowing the world, and these ways are bound up with social, economic, political structures which embody underlying relations of power. In other words, language is ideological (Gee, 1996; Fairclough, 1989), a term applied specifically to literacy by Street (1984) to powerful effect. In the context of academic work and study, the focus on knowledge means that the epistemological dimension of language is particularly important. However, this is currently very much an “oppositional” (Lillis, 2003) view. As Turner (2011) has convincingly shown, HE in the UK and elsewhere is in the hegemonic grip of a profoundly decontextualised, transparent and ‘container’ view of language, even within disciplines where discourse-based understandings of structure, agency and identity are not unusual. She traces in detail how this linguistic *status quo* is maintained in the academy through the “capillary effects of power” (p. 46) in the Foucauldian sense, of power/knowledge in discourse. The methodology adopted in the present study connects with Turner’s recent work in that it traces how discourses, practices and identities are mutually (re)constructed, and sometimes contested, in myriad ways in the daily embodied activities and attitudes of academic teachers around student writing, in a manner which has parallels with Foucault’s ‘genealogical’ investigation (Tamboukou and Ball, 2003).

### **3.5 The Research Process**

In this section I aim to account for the series of decisions made in carrying out this research project from initial recruitment of participants to the ‘final’ stages of analysis. In representing the research in a formal written thesis, there is an inevitable suggestion of neatness and linearity, whereas the process of qualitative

social research is recursive and also often ‘messy’. For example, in this section data generation has been separated from analysis, although in reality “in ethnography the analysis of data is not a distinct stage”<sup>11</sup> (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 205). I begin in section 3.5.1 by considering who was involved in the study and why, and how the processes of recruitment and selection of participants shaped the research. In section 3.5.2 I discuss the different types of data generated and the methodological issues raised in each case. I move on in section 3.5.3 to address a particular methodological issue for this study centred on the use of the term ‘writing’.

### 3.5.1 *The participants*

❖ *The object of inquiry: the individual participant as the basis of a ‘case’.*

The power of the case study approach “lies in revealing the richness and complexity of the phenomenon under investigation” (Ivanič and Weldon, 1999: 173). An important early decision was to make the practices of academic teachers the principal ‘object’ of inquiry and to build case studies around the practices of individual academic teachers, consistent with my interest in their lived experience. I began with a wide framing of what practice might entail in each case and what would or would not count as connecting with student writing, with the intention of being open to aspects of institutional context as they emerged. The aim was, as far as possible, to allow participants to play some role alongside my own interests

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<sup>11</sup> See 7.4.2 for an example of how data generation and analysis were intertwined.

as a researcher, in deciding what was relevant in their context (Lillis, 2008; Barton and Hamilton, 1998).

❖ *Recruitment of participants to the study and sampling issues*

Another important early decision was to draw participants from a range of different UK institutions. Participants were drawn from six different universities, geographically clustered in one region of the UK, which I have placed in five categories as follows:

<b>University Type</b>	<b>Description of type</b>	<b>Institution Pseudonym</b> (Acronym used in thesis text)	<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>
Distance Learning University	A large, nation-wide institution where most students study part time, at a distance, often on-line, with occasional face-to-face contact.	DLU	Pam Russell Sue
Oxbridge University	A highly prestigious university (one of Oxford or Cambridge) with an international reputation. Large, but divided into many smaller colleges where academic teachers are generally based.	OBU	Angela Tom

New University (Two institutions)	A former College of Higher Education, inaugurated as a university in the past 10-15 years, and small in size relative to universities in other categories.	NU1  NU2	Mike  James  Diane  Paul
Post-1992 University	A former Polytechnic, until 1992 and the Further and Higher Education Act, at which point it became a university.	P92U	Robert  Deborah  (Russell and Pam also work here but in this study the main focus was their work for DLU)
Russell Group University	A large, prestigious, long-established, research-intensive institution, belonging to an elite grouping of 'top' UK universities.	RGU	Dan  Emma  Martin

**Table 1: Types of UK university where participants were based.**

To some extent, these institutional categorisations are *a priori* of the research, and are drawn from the contemporary organisation and discourse of UK HE, informing much of the debate around HE practice, and used by other researchers in HE pedagogy and in academic literacies (e.g. Gourlay, 2011a, 2011b; Lea and Jones, 2010a; Lea and Stierer, 2009) as they are here. Some of these labels were also used by participants in the study, particularly “Oxbridge” and “Russell Group”. It is important to note, however, that although they are ‘real’ operational categories, through which institutions define and position themselves in relation to one another, they are also potentially fluid: for example, during the writing of this



thesis, several universities in the UK joined the Russell Group” on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2012 (*The Guardian*, 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2012).

In setting out to draw participants from different types of institution, my aim was to include academic teachers from as wide a range of institutional contexts as possible, ranging in size, mode of ‘delivery’, status, reach of reputation, and research/teaching emphasis. I thus sought to strengthen the warrantability of understandings generated in the study by addressing some “expected relevant heterogeneity” (Gomm *et al.*, 2000: 107) amongst academic teachers in the UK, presuming that some differences might be expected to arise from working in these diverse institutional contexts (see also Lea and Jones, 2010a)<sup>12</sup>. In the thesis, I have linked individual participants with the specific type of institution they work in, to signal that as well as individual differences, some differences in practice structured at institutional level are in reach of the methodology adopted. However, I did not recruit individual participants to the study as ‘representative’ of their institutional contexts or presume that they were ‘typical’ of their settings (see Clegg, 2008). The complex particularities of an academic teacher’s institutional and disciplinary context, the way in which it impacts on/is construed by them, and the way in which they position themselves/are positioned within that context while engaged in practices around student writing, were more central to the study than the characteristics of particular types of institution.

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<sup>12</sup> One type of institution, HE in Further Education, now common in the UK was unfortunately not included in the study. See 3.5.3 below.

Participants were also recruited with other dimensions of variation in mind: part-time/full-time, gender, age, seniority and discipline (see Clegg, 2008 for a similar approach). Given the practical difficulties in recruiting busy academic teacher participants to the study, I was fortunate in being able to include individuals who did present a fairly wide range in these respects. Two of the participants referred to their experience of growing up and studying in HE systems outside the UK; one of these had learned English as a foreign/study language. Ethnicity was not otherwise signalled by participants. Thus the approach taken could be broadly described as “strategic” sampling (Ivanič *et al.*, 2007; Flyvbjerg, 2006) but was also shaped by “convenience” – geographical accessibility for the researcher (Barton and Hamilton, 1998) - and “opportunity” i.e. availability of contacts (see for example Orr, 2010). A sample letter of approach is included in Appendix B.

One strength of the study was that participants were recruited through varying routes – personal, professional and ‘cold’ contacts all played a part. The fact that not everyone in the sample could be said to have any intrinsic interest in the topic of my research also strengthened the research; nevertheless, at the very least, those who agreed to take part had to feel that my enquiries were in some way relevant to their work (see 3.5.3). As in many studies of writing pedagogy, there is an element of self-selection which means that academics who are simply not interested in student writing (or in students) do not appear empirically (Deane and O’Neill, 2011). Participants may well have been partly motivated to take part because they had something positive to talk about, or something to say about the topic of my research as they had construed it. For example, Robert was interested in “geographical literacy” as the representation of landscape using drawing, so this

came up at interview, and intersected in interesting ways with my own research questions (see 5.4.3 and 6.2.3).

❖ *Introducing the participants*

Participants were given pseudonyms at an early stage of data generation. They are listed in the table below.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Institution pseudonym</b>	<b>Academic teaching position and discipline</b>	<b>Other brief work details</b>
Angela	Oxbridge (OBU)	Full time Postgraduate Research Student, doing some part time undergraduate teaching in Anthropology.	American national studying and working in the UK, approaching end of PhD and seeking her first full time academic post in the UK.
Dan	Russell Group (RGU)	Full time Senior Lecturer in Physical Geography. Research and teaching.	Well-established member of staff.
Deborah	Post-1992 (P92U)	Full time Professor in History. Research and teaching.	Long-standing member of staff engaged in a number of research projects, having stepped down as Head of Department.
Diane	New 2 (NU2)	Full time Senior Lecturer in Sports Science. Teaching only.	Long-standing member of staff who worked in the institution before it was inaugurated as a university.

Emma	Russell Group (RGU)	Full time Senior Lecturer in Computer Science. Research and teaching.	European (non-UK) national, in her first academic post in the UK and relatively early in her career.
James	New 1 (NU1)	Full time Senior Lecturer in Human Geography. Research and teaching.	Long-standing member of staff.
Martin	Russell Group (RGU)	Senior Clinical paediatrician undertaking part time teaching on top of clinical responsibilities.	Well-established member of staff and course leader for an intercalated degree.
Mike	New 1 (NU1)	Full time Senior Lecturer in Human Geography and Head of School of Geography. Research and teaching.	Well-established member of staff.
Pam	Distance Learning (DL) [+ P92U]	Part time lecturer in Psychology and Social Science. Teaching only.	Well-established in part time role; also runs a business from home, and working as a part time teacher at P1992.
Paul	New 2 (NU2)	Full time Senior Lecturer in Sport Development. Teaching only with research to be phased in.	New to academic work, in second year of post, having come from "industry".
Robert	Post-1992 (P92U)	Full time Senior Lecturer in Human Geography. Research and teaching.	Long-standing member of staff.

Russell	Distance Learning (DLU) [+ P92U]	Part time lecturer in Social Science and Politics Teaching only.	Well established in part time role, also working as a full time researcher for P1992.
Sue	Distance Learning (DLU)	Part time lecturer in Science and Environmental Science. Teaching only.	Well established in part time role.
Tom	Oxbridge (OBU)	Full time Fellow in Law. Research and teaching.	Long-standing member of staff, also working on a consultancy basis to legal firms.

**Table 2: List of study participants**

### 3.5.2 Data generation

#### ❖ *Research phases over time*

Data generation fell roughly into three phases as set out in the table below; in the thesis, I have drawn on data from all three phases.

Phase	No. of participants	Data types
Phase 1: trialling methodology	3	Initial Interviews
Phase 2: building case studies	13 (2 of whom took part in phase 1)	Two interviews with each participant, gathering of other relevant information, and texts, making of field notes.
Phase 3: building	6 (drawn from the	Following from interviews, a mixture of

more detailed case studies	13 in phase 2)	some of the following for each person: teaching or small group session observation, audio recordings while marking, e-forum messages, texts, field notes, photos.
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**Table 3: Phases of the research project**

Data were gathered over a period of 39 months (October 2007 – January 2011) in total; however, this was not continuous or regular contact. For some participants, the different contacts spanned two months in total; for others this was over two years.

❖ *Summary of data generated*

The table below summarises the data generated for the study. The subsequent discussion deals with each data type in turn as shown.

<b>Data type</b>	<b>Quantity and notes</b>
Initial interviews 1-1.5 hours and transcripts	14
Second interviews 1-1.5 hours and transcripts, following up issues raised in 1 <sup>st</sup> interview, focused on particular texts e.g. feedback sheet, annotated student essay, e-mails to students	12
Paper-based and electronic texts, e.g. marked assignments, electronic forum messages, writing guidance materials, module documentation.	Approx. 100. (Some items consist of several parts but count as 1, e.g. marked essay with separate feedback sheet; e-mail exchange). See Appendix C.
Audio-recorded face-to-face sessions with students + Observation notes.	4 (Some consist of several consecutive sessions with different students).  Approx. 7 hours in total.

Participants' audio-recorded "talk around text" while marking students' scripts.	3 (2 x 1 hour; 1 x 16 hour)
Field notes	One 'diary entry' per research visit (approx. 30). (Some summarised from audio-recorded notes made soon after each visit.)
Photos	8-10
University web pages	Approx. 10

**Table 4: Summary of data generated**

The particular mix of data differed for each person (Barton and Hamilton, 1998), with some progressive 'funnelling' of attention on six of the participants who were happy to be involved in further data generation. Representations were shared with those participants for whom detailed case studies are presented in this thesis, and their comments invited (see 3.8.1). Details of data for each participant are set out in Appendix D.

#### ❖ *Interviews*

As Briggs (1986) argues, interviews are a "taken-for-granted" part of the routine communicative repertoire of qualitative researchers. Briggs' conclusion, based on issues he encountered while conducting ethnographic research in a Chicano community in the US State of New Mexico, is that the researcher must learn the communicative practices of the community s/he is studying rather than imposing her/his own. The challenge here is on the surface slightly different, since the interviewees in this study were all familiar with some aspects of academic research practices. Nevertheless, I needed to be alert to the possibility that we

might not share the same assumptions about the meaning of the interview (e.g. see 3.5.3).

Where possible, two interviews were conducted with each person (2 out of 14 declined a second interview) in order to avoid superficial or misleading interpretations. Even where the talk is anchored to a discussion of a particular text or texts, there is a danger that a single interview will result in “reifying writer perspectives as expressed in one moment in time” (Lillis, 2008: 361), a danger reduced by conducting more than one interview as part of a mix of data sources.

Interview schedules are included in Appendix E. Inevitably, I have been selective from the outset in seeking and recording information about participants. An early decision was not to set out to gather detailed biographical information, as in the literacy history interview which is a common feature in literacies research (e.g. Lillis and Curry, 2010; Boz, 2009; Brandt, 2009; Lillis, 2001; Barton and Hamilton, 1998), and in research taking a critical view of the student experience (e.g. Mann, 2008, 2000; Haggis, 2004). In this study, although open-ended interviews did sometimes lead in the direction of participants’ own past experiences of academic literacy/ies as writers or teachers, I did not ask this question explicitly, allowing participants to make their own connections where they felt this was relevant. An emphasis on interviews, and on talk around text within those, may also have made some practices, such as feedback-giving, more visible in the research than for example classroom-based activities. In keeping with an underpinning view of language as a ‘way of being in the world’, interviews were not treated as straightforward or transparent accounts: like other communicative practices, they



are performative, and interviewers and interviewees are involved in a moment-to-moment construction of the event and of their own identities in relation to each other through talk. This has implications for subsequent transcription and analysis (see 3.6.3).

❖ *Talk around text (interviews)*

A particular advantage, in a study of this kind where professional practice is being investigated, is that the incorporation of “naturally-occurring textual material” helps researchers to avoid “idealised or generalised responses in ... interviews” (Lea and Stierer, 2009: 422). In the present study, ‘talk around text’ was used as the basis of the second interview. This form of interview talk has been widely used, though in varying ways, by academic writing researchers. Lillis (2008) describes these different ways as falling along a text-writer (etic/emic) continuum; at one end, she argues, are studies where textual analysis is primary and writer perspectives garnered through talk are treated as supplementary, as often in the field of EAP (e.g. she cites Hyland, 1999); at the other end, are more deeply ethnographic studies where writers’ perspectives are to the fore. The present study tends towards this latter position, except that the texts chosen by study participants often involved them in textual practices as readers or assessors rather than as writers (see 3.3.3). However, it was sometimes possible to probe the textual choices made by participants e.g. as producers of feedback or of advice texts for students, although they may not have thought of themselves as writers in this context (see 3.6.4).

❖ *Audio-recorded teaching session, with written notes made from observations.*

For some participants, I had the opportunity to observe and audio-record sessions of face-to-face contact with students. The type of event depended on participants' practices and what they had talked about during interviews. I did not seek to conduct 'participant observation' in these cases, but, having been introduced as a research student, sat in the room making notes about the physical setting, positioning of participants etc. However, in some cases the rooms were very small, at other times participants called on me for my opinion or commented on my presence to students, so it was impossible to blend into the background. During analysis, I took account of my own presence as a researcher in the setting in much the same way as I had done for interviews.

❖ *Participants' 'talk around text' recorded while marking.*

Marking and feedback-giving emerged as important aspects of participants' practices around their students' writing (see 6.1.1). These were usually solitary and unobserved activities, unlike much data in educational research which involves classrooms or other communal spaces. Therefore, part way through the study I decided to try to gather participants' accounts of this practice in the more immediate time and place of its unfolding, through the use of audio-recording. As Prior comments, there is "no way to get the 'whole story' of any text" (2004: 172), but this was an attempt to add to the picture already building up through interviews, observations and texts. The data generated through this process were similar to those often produced by "think aloud" protocols (Bloxham *et al.*, 2011; Leander and Prior, 2004; Prior, 2004); however, the analytical approach taken was not to treat this material as revealing participants' 'thoughts', but as an extension of 'talk around texts' (see above), tied more closely in time and space to the

reading and writing going on within a literacy event, centred on the marking of a particular student text.

Three participants agreed to record themselves while marking student assignments. The resulting data were rich and interesting, but very varied: Sue made sixteen hours of recordings, while marking seven assignments; Mike talked for approximately one hour through the marking of two essays; Tom marked two exam scripts as part of a batch, and made recordings immediately after marking each individual exam essay, totalling about one hour. See Appendix F for participant instructions.

#### ❖ *Transcription*

All of the above forms of data were actively shaped through the process of research. In addition, they were transcribed so that they could be used more easily for analysis and represented in written form, although I continued to go back to the audio-recorded data to check understandings from time to time. Conducting transcription was useful as a means of getting to know the data well (Tilley, 2003). However, like any other meaning-making practice, transcription is not a transparent conveyor of 'reality', but a means of representation which refracts rather than reflects; Lapadat and Lindsay (1999: 81) argue that it is important to acknowledge this in order to open "the transcription process for examination of its trustworthiness as an interpretive act". Transcription is never neutral, always involves selection at a number of levels, and decisions which affect how a transcript is read and subsequently analysed. My approach was to produce a

broadly orthographic transcription with the focus on the verbal but with some nonverbal information (see Appendix G for transcription choices and conventions).

#### ❖ *Texts*

Participants who agreed to take part in a second interview were asked to select a text or texts for discussion which they felt reflected their work around student writing. A prompt list was offered of the types of text which might be suitable, although participants were free to choose any text they thought appropriate (see Appendix H). In addition, I gathered other texts as opportunity arose: sometimes offered by participants, sometimes gathered from the public domain: for example, participants' profiles on university web pages. Where appropriate, scanned versions of parts of texts have been included in the thesis as illustrations. Where pages have been cropped or reduced to accommodate them in the main text, uncropped or enlarged versions have been included in Appendix L for reference.

#### ❖ *Field Notes*

A field notebook was kept for all research visits and other contacts with participants. These recorded snatches of informal conversation which took place off the record where these were of interest, my impressions and thoughts immediately after visits, including reflections on the research process, self-evaluations of how the interview had been conducted, or descriptions of the physical settings where participants worked.

#### ❖ *Photographs*

Some academic literacies research illustrates the value of photographs as part of the empirical mix (e.g. Mannion *et al.*, 2007). Very occasionally, photographs of their workplaces were taken either by me, with participants' permission, or by participants at my request. In hindsight, it would have been a good idea to take more photos (see 8.4.1). Some participants often worked at home; however, except in two cases, it was not possible to take photographs of this home-based aspect of their work.

### 3.5.3 *Writing: the elephant in the room*

A significant methodological issue for this particular project is the question of what happened when I used the word 'writing' from the outset in contacts with participants, how this shaped data generation and analysis, and ultimately how it must be taken into account when drawing any conclusions. As discussed in sections 3.4.5 and 2.7.3, notions of writing as transparent and separate from knowledge-making, noticeable principally when in 'deficit', hold powerful sway in the academy. This means that the very term "student writing", used in the study's working title and so signalled to potential participants from the beginning, is likely to have brought such associations to the fore. This in turn is likely to have led potential and actual participants to make certain assumptions about my interests as a researcher, or the relevance of my research to their work.

Importantly, in the first instance, this led some to de-select themselves on the basis that their work was not relevant to my research: I received responses to this effect from people who I would have liked to include in the study. Even more concerning is the possibility that some people may have decided not to take part

because of their own fear of being found wanting by a researcher who might judge their language use. This was the explanation given to me by the manager of HE provision at an FE college who had supported me to approach staff in a friendly and unthreatening way, ultimately with no success. Conversely, other participants may have been attracted to take part because they held strong views about writing as a major student problem which they expected me to share. Clearly, there is a good chance that study findings are strongly influenced by these prior assumptions about 'writing', shaping what participants talked about, the discourses they drew on to make sense of their practices for me, the types of document they drew my attention to and the classes they invited me to observe. Hence there was a risk that the research framing would be mirrored in findings in such a way as to obscure important aspects of practice, and thus to limit the validity of the research.

This risk was reduced in a number of ways. During interactions with participants I tried to probe or question their apparent assumptions about writing, sometimes asking them to comment on a different perspective, for example to move away from questions of spelling or grammar, or to tell me about areas of their practice which they had not focused on up to that point. Interviews were kept only partly structured, to allow participants' own concerns and interests to emerge (English, 2011). Some practices around writing seemed to surface more readily at moments when attention was allowed to wander away from 'writing'. For example, James focused throughout two interviews on what might be termed 'surface features', particularly spelling, but also grammar, paragraphing and punctuation. It is when we were winding up the first interview that he referred in passing to developing new disciplinary vocabulary in students, which he does through his own ways of talking in lectures and classes:

*That's one of the main points of lectures is not so much the content but how it's delivered ... you're showing that you/one is emulating other researchers that have contributed to the field ... [It] reflects obviously their oral work first and foremost ... but also their written work.*

This account did not emerge when, earlier in the interview, I had asked about what James did as part of face-to-face teaching which addressed student writing. This example serves to illuminate the benefits of an in-depth and open-ended approach, which helped to reduce the risk of circularity around dominant understandings of what counts as 'writing'. It also alerts us to the fact that certain aspects of their work around writing were less visible to participants and so may have emerged less certainly or consistently in the data gathered for the study. Nevertheless, the finding that such aspects of disciplinary writing work were 'second thoughts' in the context of this study in itself speaks volumes about the perceived location of language in relation to disciplinary teaching and learning.

Another important means of reducing the possibility of distortion was the use of different types of data, some of which were 'naturally occurring', for example, texts which were already in use (see for example 4.4.3). Despite the obvious challenges, it was important to *try* to conduct writing research with non-writing specialists. Like Barton and Hamilton in their study of vernacular literacies, I felt it was important to move on to this new territory, and in particular to find out about the practices around student writing of academic teachers in the disciplines "who may not think very much at all about reading and writing as they carry on their

lives” (1998: 60) – but who are nevertheless routinely engaged in practices which constitute academic literacies for students.

### **3.6 Analysis**

#### *3.6.1 Horizontal and vertical/warp and weft.*

Data analysis took place across and beyond the period of data generation, beginning from different starting points. One useful way of describing ‘ways in’ to a morass of complex data is provided by Barton and Hamilton’s detailed account of their analysis on the ‘Local Literacies’ project. They use the metaphor of “horizontal and vertical slicing” (1998: 70) to describe different routes through the data, where in-depth exploration of one person’s practices is “vertical”, and tracing patterns across different participants is “horizontal”. This horizontal/vertical metaphor is useful for placing an orderly framework around a process that can feel overwhelming. However, in the analysis for the study I have adapted this notion, moving away from the idea of slicing through the data towards the analogy of warp and weft. I use this in the thesis to describe the way in which I moved back and forward between the development of detailed individual case studies or warp threads, and the weaving of connections between cases, which then provided broader insights which were connected back to further work on individual case studies. This metaphor has several affordances: firstly, it suggests ‘texture’ and the layered weaving of an analytical text, and so is helpful in preventing an artificial separation between ‘doing’ and ‘writing’ analysis. Secondly, it conveys something of the iterative, shuttling process I undertook during analysis, moving between one type of data and another and pulling elements from each together. The metaphor is also useful because, consistent with a ‘social practice’ lens, it suggests a less



neat process, and allows for the possibility of introducing complex elements which disrupt over-tidy general patterning in data analysis, as I have sought to do in data chapters of the thesis, for example through the insertion of 'Windows' providing thick descriptions of individuals' practice in Chapter 5.

### *3.6.2 Generation of themes explored in data chapters*

I began by exploring data for individual participants, with a view to pulling out from a range of sources what seemed 'significant' to them in their experience of work with student writing. This was achieved by carefully working through the data to identify ideas and wordings which participants returned to: for example, Sue's repeated concerns over the time her work takes (see 4.5.3), or Mike's characterisation of essays as "traditional" and "boring" (see 7.3.3). This process also involved identifying meanings which participants seemed to stress by other means, such as gesture or intonation, and striking uses of language, such as Deborah's "Sisyphean" reference, see 6.2.3, or Dan's single use of "ain't" discussed in 6.3.4, as well as by their own evaluations, such as Paul's repeated negative stories involving "academic" attitudes (see 6.3.2) or Mike's metacommentary "scholarship is really important to any academic" (7.3.3). Further details of how data was analysed at a detailed level is given in sections 3.6.3 and 3.6.4 below.

To some extent what emerged as significant was shaped in response to open questions in interviews, such as "Could you tell me about what you do, as part of your role as Lecturer in [X], which is intended to help students directly with their writing?" (Appendix E). Participants' responses thus highlighted aspects of their

practice and experience which they chose to focus on in the context of the interview and of their preoccupations. Some of these were pursued through follow up questions or prompts (e.g. my question to Mike about academic writing as “hoop jumping”, quoted in section 7.3.3). This process of identifying salient aspects of participants’ practice or interview talk for further discussion or clarification inevitably involved my own framings as a researcher. Thus the teasing out of the individual warp threads of analysis involved a recursive process of data generation for each participant.

This stage of analysis then fed into a more thematic, “weft-like” stage in which I began to identify connections and echoes across data for different participants. Again, themes emerged as a combination of the “emic” and the “etic”. For example, most participants made some reference to the fact that they felt that students did not read written feedback; this point often emerged as an unprompted aside while participants were talking in general terms about their practices. Comments along similar lines also emerged in response to a specific question which found its way into the interview schedule as it touched on key issues within existing literature on student experience of assessment in higher education: “How do students respond, in your view, to the interventions, approaches or other contacts you have described?” (see 2.3.1, 2.3.3 and Appendix E). Recurrent references to a sense of not being read/heard/listened to then developed into a theme which has fed into sections of Chapter 6 in particular, merging with a similar theme of invisibility (not being seen/noticed/valued).

Recursiveness also enabled me to move between warp and weft/vertical and horizontal in analysis. For example, a theme which had emerged as important in a few participants' cases might then be raised when data gathering in other cases and connections made between participants on this basis. An example of this is the way in which the National Student Survey (NSS) emerged as significant in the study. The first few participants interviewed in the early stages of the project mentioned the Survey – without any prompting – in the course of discussion about their work (see 5.5.5), particularly in connection with feedback-giving, possibly because “assessment and feedback” have emerged repeatedly in Survey results in recent years as particularly problematic areas of the ‘student experience’ (see also 2.3.3). This was not anticipated; however, as a result of its recurrence in these early interviews I then began enquiring at the end of later interviews – if participants had not already mentioned it – whether they had heard of the Survey and whether it meant anything for them in terms of their work with student writers. Some participants' concerns with the NSS then fed into the broader theme of accountability, addressed in 5.5.

### *3.6.3 Analysis of talk: content, discourse and performance*

In keeping with the epistemological underpinnings of the project, analysis of transcribed talk – from interviews and other recordings (whether around specific texts or not) I followed an adapted version of the framework set out by Lillis (2008: 366)

	<b>Three Ways of Viewing Talk Around Academic Texts</b>
1	<b>As transparent/referential</b> Insider accounts/perspectives, practices and information about the participant e.g. the post they occupy, discipline, which courses and students they teach etc.
2	<b>As discourse/indexical</b> As indexing specific discourses about self, academic writing, academia etc.
3	<b>As performative/relational</b> Researcher and researched performing research, identity, power, specific practices at specific moment/place in time

**Table 5: Analytical approaches to data**

These three aspects of data were approached in tandem through careful reading and re-reading of transcripts alongside other data:

1. Attention to the referential aspect of participants' accounts meant listening to their stories, stated feelings and experiences as well as noting factual information. It was important to treat participants' accounts seriously and as "authentic in the sense of meaningful to them" (Lillis 2008: 365).
2. It is also important to understand interview talk in terms of the discourses which participants draw on in making sense of the topic which may be more or less overtly signalled – this is where the analyst's perspective is brought to bear. This aspect of analysis follows from a view of language and social events as both "unique and structured" (Blommaert, 2007: 682), so that particular language or literacy events are in a dialectical, mutually shaping relationship with larger social structures and 'world views' or ideologies. Thus, I was alert to wordings and topics which appeared to index particular

views of writing or teaching (for example see analysis in 7.2). However, it was always important to look at the specific meanings and uses of these wordings in context, and not to assume a straightforward correspondence between a particular word and a particular discourse or world view (e.g. see 7.3.1).

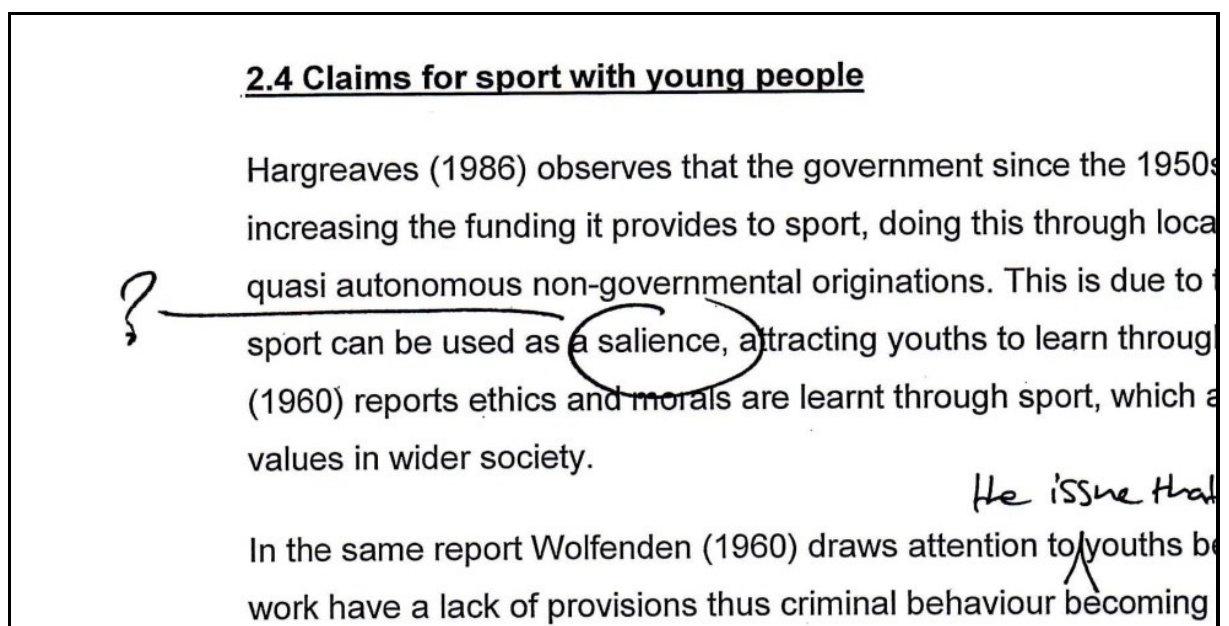
3. Attention to the performative nature of data – particularly relevant to, but not confined to, interview talk – involved reading data closely as interaction and reflecting in detail on the context in which talk was being produced. This involved paying attention to nonverbal as well as verbal aspects of the interview talk. For example, where participants' intonation, nonverbal sound or gesture appeared to mark a particular emphasis or meaning, or where their pronunciation suggested that they were performing the 'voice' of another, I recorded the relevant information for the transcript, and drew on this in subsequent analysis (e.g. see analysis of an interview with James in 7.2.1).

#### *3.6.4 Textual analysis*

In the thesis, I always comment on particular texts or parts of text in relation to what participants have done with/said about them. Where the specific writing choices made by academic teachers were significant for them or for students, detailed analysis of textual forms was one important route into understanding practice (see 3.3.3 above). Therefore I have included some analysis of feedback and guidance texts written by participants, treating them, like interview talk, as referential, indexical and performative. For example, a substantial text such as an assessment criteria document can be viewed simultaneously as conveying

information about the curriculum, the writing practices required of students and the planned pedagogies around them, as indexing particular discourses of writing and assessment, and as constructing and performing particular social relations (e.g. of authority or hierarchy) and identities of teacher and students. These different layers of meaning are built up through an analysis of the text themselves in relation to other data available.

A similar approach has been adopted for the analysis of participants' feedback comments. In data gathered for the study, these often comprise very short texts or textual fragments in the form of marginal comments scattered throughout a student's assignment. To illustrate the insights offered by this type of textual analysis of feedback comments in conjunction with other data, I illustrate here with the example of a tiny fragment of feedback from an assignment marked by Paul – a circle drawn around a single word, and a single question mark in the margin (see Figure 1):



**Figure 1: Paul: marginal markings on a student assignment**  
See Appendix L(1).

The second interview includes the following talk around this part of the text, while Paul and I look at the assignment together, where the student has used the word “salience” in a way which makes no immediate sense to either of us:

*J: I wonder what [I don't know I] he or she meant*

*P: I'm glad that you said that because I'm still wondering if there is some very obscure use of the word salience which means that it's absolutely correct, so I've just gone with a circle and a question mark, yes 'oh what do you mean'*

Thus we learn that Paul's use of a question mark in the margin is intended to signal his uncertainty about the student's use of the word “salience” in this context (elsewhere he talks about using a question mark in feedback to “cover yourself” in case the student is right). His confidence that the word is not saying what the student means is reinforced by my reading of the sentence as puzzling, despite my total unfamiliarity with the subject, because it concerns “vocabulary”.

In their seminal article, Lea and Street discuss the question mark in relation to the modality of tutor feedback in a particular marked assignment: “The question mark frequently indicates not a genuine question which tutor and student are engaged in explicating, but rather is used as a kind of expletive, or as a categorical assertion that the point is not ‘correct’” (1998: 169). In this example of Paul's, we cannot know what the student's reading of his question mark was, but it is clear that his intention was anything but ‘categorical’, rather from his perspective it signalled his

uncertainty and thus a relatively low modality. The question mark may in this case be used more to protect himself from exposing what he fears might be his own ignorance - even if the effect on the student is otherwise. This small example illustrates the need to address feedback as a social practice, as well as a recognisable communicative genre, and as a site of contested meanings which emerge through analysis of text as part of multiple sources of data.

### ***3.7 The case study research paradigm and claims to trustworthy knowledge***

#### ***3.7.1 Internal validity***

While terms such as validity and reliability are “transformed and challenged” (Barton and Hamilton, 1998: 58) within an interpretive research paradigm, nevertheless any account must address questions of the trustworthiness of its claims. In this chapter I have therefore sought to indicate where issues of trustworthiness arose and how they were dealt with. Methodological openness and reflexivity about my own role in the research process have been key ways in which I have tried to ensure that I make only warrantable claims for this research (Hammersley, 2011). I have shared interpretations of data with colleagues and with some participants in the study and reconsidered them in light of this. During the course of the study, I considered how the trustworthiness of the study could be maximised, for example by taking advantage of the extended period available and the good will of some participants who shared data with me over a considerable period of time. I have sought to ensure a close fit between methodological and analytical decisions, epistemology and research questions. These processes, it is



hoped, have increased the “internal validity” of the research (Ivanič and Weldon, 1999).

### *3.7.2 Multiple sources of data*

The trustworthiness of claims made in this research is enhanced by the fact that it draws on a wide range of different data types, analysed alongside one another, including data which were naturally occurring. The principle value, from an ethnographic perspective, of bringing different types of data together in building case studies is that together they enable the researcher to form a “rich picture” and so to go some way towards addressing the complexity of social events and practices (Blommaert, 2007). As discussed above, some selection is inevitable at every stage of data generation; however, the aim here is to view the object of inquiry from a number of angles in order to create “thick description” (Geertz, 1975; see also Lillis, 2008, 2001; Ivanič and Weldon, 1999). The main purpose, then, of such multiplicity, is not to achieve ‘accuracy’ in the sense that the researcher hopes that different sources of information will necessarily converge on the same single point. Different types of data may bring complementary or contradictory insights which the researcher must then work through to develop an overall picture: if conflicts are thrown up, this does not invalidate findings or imply ‘error’. Nevertheless, the use of multiple sources does provide a means of “methodological triangulation” (Denzin, 2001). As a means of investigation, it lends reach and trustworthiness to the claims that can be made about ‘social practice’ without unduly reducing its complexity.

### 3.7.3 Generalisability

In context-sensitive, qualitative research, there are always difficult issues of generalisability and the possibility of claims to wider relevance (Gomm *et al.*, 2000; Hammersley and Gomm, 2000). Efforts to select an appropriate and wide-ranging sample of participants, the application of semi-structured tools of inquiry within an overall approach that was open-ended, and methodological reflexivity, enable me to claim some legitimate wider relevance for the findings emerging from this project. Ultimately, however, here, as often in the case study research paradigm, the question of generalisability to other contexts takes the form of a reasonable proposal to the reader familiar with those other contexts, rather than a categorical claim: the extent of applicability is something that can only be determined dialogically. Some authors argue that ethnographic research should not be regarded as an individualistic endeavour, but a collective one, in which different researchers add incrementally to a larger picture and seek to build knowledge through critical dialogue between their own work and that of others (Hammersley, 2011). This study builds on others in academic literacies and derives some of its validity from its relationship to the field, as well as standing alone.

## 3.8 Ethics

Because of ethnographers' interest in 'what is going on' in 'natural' social settings, the ethical issues confronting them can be complex. Ethnography, perhaps more than some other forms of social research, has the potential to be intrusive (see also 3.4.3). Also, because of its unfolding and contingent nature there can be hurdles, for example surrounding consent, which tend to trouble researchers less acutely in other, more pre-planned paradigms. Crang and Cook make a useful

distinction between “Ethics with a capital E” which they use to refer to broad and fixed principles which shape research plans at the outset, and “ethics with a little ‘e’” which are bound up with smaller everyday decisions made in shifting and messy situations (2007: 31-3). Throughout the research, I used both the Open University Research Ethics Guidelines (<http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics>) and the British Educational Research Association guidelines (<http://www.bera.ac.uk/resources>) as reference points but inevitably had to interpret these in context as the research progressed. In this section I set out the major E/ethical issues which presented themselves during the course of this research and how they were addressed.

### *3.8.1 The researcher’s responsibility to participants*

#### *❖ Treating participants properly and well*

My research was partly motivated by a desire to conduct academic writing research which took the concerns of academic subject teachers seriously, though stopping short of “advocacy” (Lea and Stierer, 2009: 418). My aim was to treat participants appreciatively, to do what I could to make them feel I was not making judgments about their practice, and to minimise the inconvenience to them of taking part. I was acutely aware of the fact that academic teachers in UK universities are extremely busy: participants in my study were no exception.

The focus on working practices rather than on ‘personal’ topics meant that there was a limited potential for harm or distress to participants. The physical location of the research, mainly in participants’ university workplaces, considerably reduced

the potential risks of harm to participants and researcher. However, as data analysis shows, there were sometimes blurred boundaries between the public and the personal where practices around writing were concerned. Sometimes participants clearly trusted me as a researcher with uncomfortable information: for example, one shared with me some very trenchant anonymous student feedback comments made about him in an end of term evaluation; another became upset when talking about how exhausted she felt by her work. Thus it was important to be sensitive to participants' feelings, for example, in the latter case I suggested we move on to a slightly different topic.

Occasionally, there was evidence that participants felt they had benefited from taking time to reflect on the questions I had raised. One person commented that the interview had made him think about something which he would take back to his department to discuss. Some participants evidently took an interest in writing matters and found our conversations stimulating. However, on the whole there was no individual gain involved for participants – their time was given generously and in some cases altruistically because of their belief that educational research can contribute to the wider good.

I sought and obtained formal approval from the University Ethics Committee before conducting the main study, having set out anticipated harms and benefits of the research. The document indicating formal approval is given in Appendix I.

❖ *Power relationships between researcher and participants*

The trust which must be placed by participants in the researcher – to be responsible with information about them, to represent them fairly, to preserve confidentiality – is an indication of the relation of power between the researcher and the researched. Any individual study takes place in a sociohistorical context in which research has often had exploitative and damaging effects on those who take part (Thesen, 2010). Academic literacies researchers have sought both to acknowledge these imbalances of power, and to minimise them, for example by treating participants as co-researchers (e.g. Ivanič and Satchwell, 2007; Ivanič and Weldon, 1999), or by maintaining contact with participants over several years (Lillis and Curry, 2010). Neither of these approaches was practical in this study.

However, research with academics can involve complex power relations (Gunasekara, 2007). For example, I sometimes felt (or was perceived to be) in a less powerful position due to my status as a postgraduate student interviewing academic staff. In addition, many of the participants were familiar with research methods and occasionally appeared to try to steer my research in one direction or another. For example, after one interview, a field diary entry notes a polite but distinct verbal “tussle” over whether a certain sort of data would be “relevant” to my study:

*Perhaps it was because James declared that the material he picked out “turned out to be less rich than I’d expected” ... something in me was thinking “I’ll be the judge of that!!”*

James explains that he had already done some sifting out of what he described as “banal” e-mails which were “not about students’ use of language necessarily”. I then ask more about these “uninformative” e-mails (James’ word) which turn out to be all about the work done around student writing: arranging 1-1 meetings, dealing with students’ worries and “sob stories” (James) etc., items which were potentially highly relevant. This kind of dynamic illustrates that the power differentials between researcher and researched were sometimes reduced in this project. Nevertheless, as researcher I made the ultimate decisions about selections and representation, and thus have the greatest degree of control in the context of this thesis.

#### ❖ *Participant consent*

All fourteen participants were given detailed information to keep about the project and given an opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to take part. All were asked to sign to indicate their informed consent (see Appendix J). In addition, it was made clear to them that they could withdraw consent to use their data at any time during the project, and they were supplied with my contact details which have remained current.

#### ❖ *Anonymity and confidentiality*

Preserving participants’ confidentiality and anonymity was fundamental to the ethical conduct of this project. In some cases, this has entailed making small adjustments to the wording of transcripts, replacing some names of people, institutions and places. Participants were given pseudonyms at an early stage in

the recording of data. All writing about the research which enters the public domain will be anonymised.

### ❖ *Peripheral participants*

All the above “Ethical” questions of harm and benefit, power, consent and confidentiality were anticipated and planned for. The same issues were to some extent anticipated with regard to more peripheral participants in the study – such as colleagues or students who were present during observed sessions, or students whose texts were being brought to interview. However, these choices had more of the nature of “ethical” with a small “e” and were more difficult to plan for (Crang and Cook, 2007). There were two sorts of “peripheral participant” to the study: participants’ academic colleagues, and students, which I deal with here in turn.

*i Participants’ colleagues.* In one case, I observed and recorded a series of small group sessions in which a participant and her colleague N<sup>13</sup> talked with students about an abstract they had prepared. I sought and received his written permission in advance. In another case, during a research visit I was informally invited to have coffee with a participant (Paul) and his colleague M. The conversation turned out to be highly pertinent. I had to make a quick decision: I did not have a consent form to hand. Instead, I simply asked both whether I could use my notes about the conversation in my study, was answered in the affirmative, and left it at that.

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<sup>13</sup> Academic teachers who became indirectly involved in the study are given an initial only, to signal their more peripheral relationship to the project.

*ii Participants' students.* Issues concerning students were more complex and fell into two main categories: students who were present during observations, and those whose texts were brought along or used by participants during the research. In the latter case, difficulty arose over the 'arm's length' relationship the research had with the students in question. I worked with individual study participants to decide the best approach to seeking their students' consent and this was therefore tackled in different ways, depending on how the participant interpreted their obligations. For example, some participants sought, on my behalf, individual students' permission to use their texts and anonymised them before I saw them. In other cases, students' permission was sought but I had to anonymise them myself as soon as possible. In all cases where I have used student text in the thesis, I have ensured that this does not identify anyone.

In cases where students were present during observations, they were asked for permission in advance. Where students in my own institution were concerned, formal procedures were followed (see Appendix K); permission was also sought to access students' electronic forum messages with their agreement. It is not possible to be completely sure that in other institutions, students did not feel obliged to give their consent. However, it seems unlikely, given their tangential involvement, that this was a problematic issue for any of them.

#### ❖ *Issues of representation*

I took some measures to ensure fairness towards participants – for example, in the preparation of this thesis, I shared longer written case studies with the relevant



individuals, in order to ensure factual accuracy, and to seek their views on my representations of them. In some cases, this meant entering into some delicate negotiations over what could be included in the thesis and how it could be best presented so as to reassure participants of their anonymity.

### *3.8.2 The researcher's responsibility towards the institutions*

Five of the six institutions involved have not been named and cannot be identified. However, it is unrealistic to suppose that DLU is not known to all who encounter this research in the UK, whether or not they are aware of the researcher's affiliation. This raises an ethical question with regard to the representation of the institution. Individuals are protected because of the size of this institution and its national spread; however, like other participants in the study, they were not always complimentary about their University and what might be termed its "institutional imperatives" (Maybin, 2000: 198). Thus I must exercise caution when presenting the research in the public domain.

## **3.9 Concluding comments**

In this chapter I have given an account of the underpinning methodology of the study, of how this was translated into methods of data generation and analysis, with the aim of being open and reflexive about how the research was conceived and carried out. This acknowledges the fundamental character of an ethnographic epistemology, in which "knowledge construction is knowledge, the process *is* the product" [author's emphasis] (Blommaert, 2006: 6). I have raised issues of the trustworthiness of knowledge claims made in the thesis, and E/ethical questions

of harms and benefits, consent, and representation, indicating how I have sought to resolve problems and strengthen my claims. In Chapter 8, I offer a critical evaluation of the study and revisit its methodological strengths and limitations. The thesis now turns to the analysis of data generated as described here, beginning in Chapter 4 with five case-study-based accounts of the practices of individual participants.

## **Chapter 4: Views from the textface: five academic teachers’ practices around student writing**

### ***4.1 Introduction: accounts based on individual case studies***

In this chapter I set out brief accounts, drawn from detailed case studies, of the practices of five individual participants, each based in one of the five different types of institution involved in the study. These cases have been selected for this chapter on the basis that they represent the spread of institutions in the study: some patterns of difference which emerged reflect institutional characteristics, and institutionally prevalent discourses. However, the individual academic teacher was the focus of each case, rather than broad-brush institutional comparisons (see 3.5.2). As the following accounts show, much of participants’ everyday practice around student writing appeared to take place beyond the reach of institutional policy and its attendant monitoring, driven by individual decisions or informal collaborative relationships between colleagues. Accordingly, the accounts which follow treat institutional context as both real and as a uniquely configured and inseparable dimension of individual practice around writing.

There were several other factors involved in selecting cases to focus on in this chapter. The five academic teachers represented here were able to provide me with particularly rich data about their ‘lived experiences’ of work around student writing. Secondly, these participants illustrate the range not only of institutions but also the variety of individual perspectives involved in the study, in terms of academic discipline, gender, age, and institutional position. Thirdly, I have chosen

to highlight these cases as the warp threads of detailed ‘thick description’ because they provide a strong basis for the weft of thematic analysis in subsequent chapters. This motivation was sometimes in tension with the aim of illustrating the fullest possible range of perspectives amongst participants – for example, there are four women in the five cases represented here, while overall men slightly outnumbered women in the study by eight to six. In these case study accounts, I aim to do justice to participants’ own perspectives and experiences by allowing, as far as possible, their own words and voices to come to the fore. As a result, the chapter draws predominantly on data sources involving participants’ own words, mainly interviews, but also web pages, guidance materials for students, and e-mails.

In order to help show how they collectively suggest more general patternings, all five accounts have been given a similar structure. I begin by setting out key contextual information about the participants’ *work in their university* as it emerged in the study, incorporating some information about the institution, and follow this up with a more specific focus on the kinds of *writing which students are required to do* ‘for’ participants.<sup>14</sup> I then go on to draw out an account of the *work around student writing* each participant talks about, routine and otherwise. In each case I then highlight what emerged about participants’ experience of *working relationships around writing*. Each section ends with a brief discussion of a small “snip” of feedback written by each participant taken from textual data gathered for

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<sup>14</sup> Inverted commas here signal that to do writing ‘for’ a particular tutor or teacher may mean different things in different contexts.

the study. It is important to recognise the “contextual specificity” (Ivanič *et al.*, 2007: 708) of the understandings which can be drawn from these participant accounts. Therefore, within this repeated structure, my intention has been not to “constrain” the data, but to allow it to “speak” rather than to force it to fit interpretations too snugly (Ivanič and Weldon, 1999: 186). The chapter ends with a discussion of some key emerging themes which are taken up in subsequent analysis. Throughout the five accounts, I have chosen to write mostly in the present tense. This involves compressing evidence gathered over a period of time into a single ‘snapshot’ and risks downplaying its constructed nature: to counter this I have indicated the type of data used through font choice (see 1.5 and Appendix A), and have neither eliminated my own presence as researcher, nor the process of data generation, entirely from the text.

## **4.2 Emma**

### **4.2.1 *Working at a Russell Group University***

In her thirties, Emma is a national of another EU country where she studied and worked until taking up her current post as Senior Lecturer in Computer Science at Russell Group University [RGU]. She speaks fluent English and has published in both her languages. Emma estimates that she engages in teaching-related activities for about one third of her working life, with two thirds spent doing research and “admin”; she teaches first, second and third year undergraduates and Masters students.

On her University webpage Emma describes herself as:

very interested in promoting student-centred learning and actively pursues her own personal and professional development in order to facilitate this approach to teaching.

[RGU web page, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> November 2010.]

She values her teaching, including much of her work around student writing, enjoying the “interaction that comes with it.” Nevertheless, in interviews Emma is emphatic that she is

*only interested in research-orientated universities ... and there the only thing that matters is my research.*

Emma describes her discipline as a very technical subject where the main preoccupation is “how ... things work”. She teaches on two modules where undergraduates do a “dedicated writing assignment” (other assignments are in computer code). One of these is a second year compulsory module with a cohort of 100 students. The other is a third/fourth year module in a specialized subject close to Emma’s own research, for which Emma is “unit leader”. From the outset, in interviews Emma talks in terms of a contrast between her practices in these two different modules.

#### *4.2.2 The writing students do for Emma*

In both units, all writing done by students for Emma is summatively assessed. In the second year unit, Emma marks half the cohort’s first assignment which requires students to produce some computer code and write a report which

“describes what they have done”. Guidelines for the report are available to students via the departmental Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), and cover what should be included (flow charts, diagram, summary, brief description and discussion). They also include criteria under the heading “Marking Guide”:

In the report we will be looking for good experimentation and analysis, clear and concise descriptions, and relevant discussion of key factors.

Emma describes in an interview how the VLE guidance is supposed to help students with writing their report:

*If they are able to relate what is written on the website to the [programming task] they have done...then they know exactly how [the report] is supposed to look.*

But she reflects that:

*[students' work] looks so different [from what we expect] ... there are huge differences in how they apparently read the website.*

In the third/fourth year unit, Emma introduced a new written assignment soon after arriving in post. Instead of an individual essay on a set theme, students choose their own topic, do some initial research and write an “extended abstract”, all in a

small group. Student groups then meet with Emma and a colleague to receive feedback, ask and answer questions and set out plans for completing the project; each group then jointly produces what Emma calls a “proper scientific paper”. Emma tells me that throughout, students are positively urged to come to the lecturers for help when they need it, and that they “know we have this two-way process going on”.

#### *4.2.3 Work around student writing*

For the second year unit, Emma is not responsible for setting the assignment or for introducing it to students. She is not sure if her colleague talks about the assignment in his class or not, but has often had students come to her informally to ask “what in heaven’s name are we supposed to do?” for this piece of work. Her first ‘official’ engagement with student writing for this unit is when fifty assignments are sent to her electronically for assessment. Before starting to mark individual scripts, Emma opens a couple at random to get a “feeling for what the majority thought they needed to do”. She then reads each one as a .pdf document on screen, with her marking criteria to hand, and types one or two paragraphs of feedback directly into the system; no comments are made on the student’s text itself. Emma describes the experience of working through fifty scripts on the same topic as “horrendous”.

For the third/fourth year unit, taught with a different colleague, Emma describes a very different working process. At every stage, students are supported by face-to-face contact, in taught and “drop in” sessions combined with an extensive range of



assignment-specific resources on the VLE (much more detailed than that available to students for the second year unit). Emma comments:

*We really try to get them to understand that they are not alone in this, if they have a problem then we really encourage them to come, and we are not making fun of them or ... seeing this as ... just a trivial thing, just a student's problem.*

After the final assignment has been submitted, Emma and her colleague N read the students' papers in a relaxed way over the Christmas holidays. She contrasts it with the second year assignment:

*This is **way** more interesting to read ... there were fifteen groups and all of them have had different topics [Emma's emphasis].*

This echoes a theme which emerged when I observed a series of group tutorials – the obvious relish on Emma's part for student writing which does not cover too-familiar territory. For example, in one session Emma says she is really pleased with the topic chosen, because it will mean “good added value for me and the other students”; to another group she remarks positively on the “added value for you writing and for me reading.”

One reason Emma gives for changing this assignment is that Masters students who take the module, often overseas students, benefit greatly from the chance to practice this sort of research-oriented writing in English in a UK setting. This

makes her life easier at a later stage when she is trying to support their dissertations and help them understand “what scientific means in terms of writing”. Another key benefit Emma sees in this way of working is that it emphasises process, rather than individual achievement and marks:

*We think the whole process is so important for them as engineers later on that this outweighs ... the difficulties we introduce [by having a group assignment].*

#### *4.2.4 Working relationships around writing*

Emma regards the second year unit and its written assignment as unsuccessful, yet has limited expectation that her views will be taken into account by her unit leader colleague; nor does she feel placed to make any more vigorous representations, despite the great unpopularity of the module amongst students. She *hopes* that the guidelines will be revised to encourage a better student response to this assignment, but does not see this as her responsibility. She explains:

*I've given ... my take on it to the responsible lecturer ... there are some courses which I'm more interested in and then I make my voice heard a bit sort of louder maybe longer, but this one ... I don't spend as much energy on it, so if he decides to set the assignment in the same way in the next term, then so be it.*

For Emma, it is not for her to actively take it upon herself to contribute to colleagues' development. She comments that “every lecturer is an island ... it

influences how we work things out". Emma believes her department lacks a "platform" for working constructively on questions of how to support students' written work. She has been told about systems in other institutions where there are departmental and faculty sessions for

*getting people from the same or similar disciplines together and have them talk about how they do things rather than analyse them [begins to laugh] in educational terms.*

These opportunities have unfortunately, she believes, disappeared in her context since the PCAP<sup>15</sup> became a formal requirement for all new lecturers, as now everything "everything goes via the teaching and learning programme".

Nevertheless, Emma offers an example where her efforts to reform her specialist module have influenced colleagues

*who then realize oh actually ... [students]'re a bit more able to now go away and write something ... one of my colleagues actually has adopted now the approach for his course which is much earlier in the curriculum.*

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<sup>15</sup> The Professional Certificate of Academic Practice, the qualification compulsory in Emma's institution for new staff members who do not already have an equivalent qualification.

This colleague has on his own initiative taken up Emma's formative, "two-way" approach on her specialist module, building in discussion between teachers and students during the process towards a final, group-produced text, having seen palpable benefits of this approach in terms of students' writing development.

Emma's mode of working on the third/fourth unit also involves an explicit shift away from the usual hierarchies in working relationships between teachers and students relative to her experience on other modules. For example, Emma's VLE introduction to the assignment suggests that the group presentation of the jointly produced paper will offer students

the unique opportunity to try out being the lecturer for a small part of the course.

These guidelines offer an explicit challenge to students to shift their orientation in relation to the discipline:

The course work aims ... to educate you to being researchers and not just consumers of research.

**Snip no. 1: Emma's feedback**

Emma brings to the second interview an assignment for a second year module which has received a “low mark” (52%). The student has completed a practical task followed by a “technical report”: Emma comments that the student “rescues himself” with the practical part, but his writing is “relatively ... meagre”. This is the first report of this kind students have been asked to produce, and something which they have not yet come across in reading either. She also provides a “typical snip of feedback”, a paragraph of about 130 words, including the following comment:

The flow chart ... is confusing and wrong.

Emma explains that this is in part because the student has not used the set of conventions and symbols typically employed in flow charts (for example, diamond-shaped boxes to indicate where different outcomes must be considered). Emma tells me this type of chart will be important and useful to the students if they take up careers as computing engineers. When I probe (as delicately as possible) to find out where she thinks the student might learn what to do next time, Emma laughs loudly and expresses doubts about the effectiveness of this “snip” of feedback:

*I'm not sure that the student, by getting it wrong and then by getting short remarks on it which tell him that's not good, actually can really improve to be honest.*

Emma tells me students can come to see lecturers for an explanation of what their flow chart should have looked like, but does not know if the “responsible lecturer” here will pick this issue up, or if he will circulate examples of good work, as happens on “many other courses”.

### **4.3 Tom**

#### *4.3.1 Working at an Oxbridge University*

Tom, in his forties, is Fellow in Law at a College of OBU, a post which he had held for sixteen years at the first interview. He is also acts as a consultant to law firms. The University is research-led, among the most prestigious in the UK and internationally. At Faculty level, Tom lectures in his specialist area of Law, a role which entails no setting or assessment of written work: this aspect of undergraduate teaching takes place in the Colleges. His College-based role is primarily as a tutor of undergraduates, an aspect of his work which he wishes he had more time for. Tom estimates that typically, he devotes fifty per cent of his University time to research and publication, thirty per cent to teaching and twenty per cent to admin roles. He views teaching and research time as in direct competition with one another, and believes that changes in teaching contact arrangements are as a direct result of enormous pressures to publish. Tom sees the teaching agenda as increasingly under threat from University-wide policies and funding arrangements which prioritise research.

The College takes under ten Law undergraduates every year; Tom teaches these and other students in his specialist subjects, and arranges tuition in other subjects for his own students. Competition for places is fierce and expectations high: Tom and a colleague produce a “Handbook for New Students”<sup>16</sup> in their own College which states:

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<sup>16</sup> Actual title substituted to ensure anonymity.

You have been selected for [College] because we believe you are capable of a first class degree.

Tom teaches four undergraduate final degree “papers” within his area of the Law, each taught over one eight-week term. “Seminars” are held in small groups of up to eight students, and “tutorials” on a 1-2, 1-3 or occasionally 1-1 basis.

Tom’s College website’s Law page explains that college tutors take a keen interest in helping students move on to the legal professions, and that there is a network of former College members, some in senior positions, who can help with this. The “Handbook for New Students” also makes an explicit connection with students’ career destinations, calling them “aspiring professionals”. In a seminar which I observed, Tom tells students an amusing first-hand anecdote recalling a professional formal dinner at which an eminent Law Professor receives an unfortunately timed mobile phone call from his wife. These and other data help to build a sense that Tom’s connection with the upper echelons of the legal profession is important to his university work. This profession-facing aspect of Tom’s work emerges clearly in his practices around undergraduate writing.

#### *4.3.2 The writing students do for Tom*

Tom comments that:

*here more than most places we can honestly say practice makes perfect ... we probably get our students to overwrite.*

New students receive a short Faculty induction delivered by existing undergraduates about how to read a case or a statute, but there is no formal induction into *writing* for a Law degree. Tom's students typically<sup>17</sup> produce twelve 1500-2,000-word pieces of writing per eight week term: *none* counts towards formal outcomes, as the degree is gained solely on the basis of final examination performance. Students also take college-based exams before each term begins, covering topics studied in the previous term. Although these exams do not count towards students' assessment outcomes, Tom explains that "the pressure" on students is that when writing employment references, he and colleagues

*are asked now pretty specifically by employers to give marks in [these exams] ... to give very clear rankings in year group.*

The "Handbook for New Students" contains some detailed "study skills" advice, particularly on how to *read* the different types of text associated with the study of Law, but also on how to approach academic writing in the discipline. Tom explains in interviews and in the "Handbook" that there are two main types of writing Law students have to do: one is the "essay" and the other, the "problem question". The essay is the more discursive and requires students to explore legal concepts

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<sup>17</sup> This is also "typical" across the institution in humanities, arts and social sciences.



critically, whereas answers to problem questions resemble the text produced by a lawyer advising a client on the basis of the law “*as it is*” [Tom’s emphasis] rather than as it should be.<sup>18</sup> Tom sees problem questions as more difficult for students, who tend to approach them mistakenly in the same way as an essay, rather than focusing on particular facts and aiming to solve the legal problem at hand. Tom explains in interviews that the decision to teach both types of written assignment distinguishes him from some colleagues.

Tom makes very clear his view that communication “orally and in writing” is “absolutely crucial” to being a “good lawyer”. He believes that if lawyers do not produce clearly written memos, this can result in an unacceptable waste of time and money. Tom sees the ability to identify a legal problem and work through it logically in writing primarily as a professional skill, sometimes lacking in the profession itself, and which, as a tutor of future lawyers, he has a responsibility to help students acquire.

#### *4.3.3 Work around student writing*

Tom’s usual routine is to set an assignment at the end of a tutorial or seminar; students submit by 5 p.m. the day before the following week’s session. He collects the assignments as e-mail attachments, usually loading them onto a memory stick to take home; occasionally he prefers to print them off and mark by hand. If marking on screen, he uses “track changes” to “correct grammar and the like”, and

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<sup>18</sup> Problem questions always end with the phrase “Advise X”, where X is one of the parties.

the “insert comments” function to annotate the text. Tom sprinkles comments in the margins, but there is no formal paperwork to complete. Nor is there reference to “assessment criteria”: the mark represents a global judgment. Students’ names are on the assignments. Typically, Tom spends the evening assessing and giving feedback on the eight assignments for the relevant class, returning them to students by e-mail, usually before the next day’s session.

Problem questions are addressed in seminars where Tom says “the mantra will be structure, structure, structure”; for example, towards the beginning of a seminar which I observed, Tom explains to students that the problem question they have prepared needs to be addressed in a series of separate paragraphs. Tom feels that there is no time in class to discuss students’ actual scripts, and these are normally put to one side. Students usually rely on written comments for feedback on their written work. However, he has recently departed from his usual routine and temporarily changed contact arrangements, to free up time to go through students’ assignments one-to-one. This new approach is not “the norm” but something that he has found “the luxury of time” for this term, because his teaching load has been reduced; Tom thinks it will be impossible to sustain in future terms. He describes paying attention in these sessions to aspects of student writing such as “grammar”, “proper sentences”, and split infinitives, and these do feature prominently in feedback comments he has made on student scripts he shares with me. This is his response to what he perceives as a long and steady decline in the quality of students’ writing relative to their oral skills and intellectual abilities. Despite his explicit awareness of the close relationship between certain types of writing and effective practice as a lawyer, he has taken on these one-to-one sessions with some reluctance:

*It's slightly galling, not to say a little frustrating and infuriating that I should be spending my time teaching writing skills, I think we should just be teaching the law, but I finally decided this term we had to do something about it.*

#### 4.3.4 Working relationships around writing

Student writing in Tom's context is bound up with relatively informal pedagogic arrangements, reflected in various dimensions of Tom's practice as a teacher. For example, session timings are flexible – seminars are supposed to last “one to one and a half” hours, expressed by Tom like this as a range, but in fact often last longer. An observation note made during one research visit records that a student, late to arrive at a seminar (of eight students), is phoned individually at Tom's request to find out if he is out of bed yet; Tom delays the start of the session by a few minutes when it turns out the student is on his way. The same session (unusually) ends early when Tom announces that he is due to watch a performance at his daughter's primary school. The informal atmosphere is also reflected in the physical space in which teaching takes place. Seminars and tutorials happen in Tom's main College room. It has a homely feel: thick carpeting, a small chandelier and traditional desk lamps. Two walls are lined with leather-bound legal case volumes; a third wall has further books, a mantelpiece and fireplace surrounded by Tom's young children's art work and other pictures. During the observed seminar, the emphasis is on Tom talking, with some question/answer and discussion; although there is a small white board in the room, it is stacked up against a wall in the corner. At one point Tom sketches a flow chart diagram on a piece of A4 paper and holds it up for students to see to explain a complicated point – a mode of working only possible in such a small and intimate group. Of the array

of faded but comfortable armchairs, one is clearly “Tom’s” - a fine old leather chair in which he sits for the seminar. Despite the home-like surroundings, Tom sometimes adopts language reminiscent of school – for example, saying “hands up who thinks ...” in the observed seminar, and in conversation with me, he sometimes calls students “boys” and “girls” (recorded in field notes). The “Handbook for New Students” for students also conveys an air of privileges allowed but which can be withdrawn at any minute – for example students are threatened with “ejection” from a tutorial if written work is not done. These details cumulatively suggest pedagogic relationships which are “familiar” in the sense of being both close and hierarchical.

Another key set of relationships for Tom which relate to his practice around student writing is centred on the profession-facing aspect of his work. For example, he explains in an interview that conversations with colleagues in the legal profession are another driver for his change of approach this term:

*I got slightly fed up of seeing senior partners in law firms and head of barristers’ chambers saying ‘these people that you’re producing, Tom, can’t write’.*

Tom seems to feel his personal reputation is at risk, which motivates his decision to take responsibility for the quality of his students’ writing.

**Snip no. 2: Tom's feedback**

vicarious liability emphasises the need for two special  
 eneral requirements of proximity and duty, to be satisfied  
 tionship of master and servant, commonly a contract of  
 s in the course of employment.

**Comment:** Might have been better to have first gone into the purpose in a little more depth before discussing the requirements. For further discussion.

**Comment:** Ugly sentence.

re likely to wish to settle a claim outside the courtroom,  
 the minimising of costs, and the claimant by speeding up  
 paid. Clearly any tool of torts law must ensure satisfactory  
 the simplest and most cost-effective and efficient means.

**Comment:** Not sure about this. To discuss.

**See Appendix L(2)**

In Tom's written feedback, marginal comments frequently include references such as these to the forthcoming class, where legal issues can be discussed at greater length. There will also be an opportunity to disentangle any misunderstandings – passages which Tom has found hard to follow can be unravelled, and the student's understanding consolidated, in a face-to-face conversation. In the case of the assignment extracted here, this will be in a 1-1 tutorial, arranged specifically with the aim of addressing the student's writing. In an interview, he tells me that the comments are really "prompts for [him]" rather than addressed to the student. In these circumstances, perhaps there will be an opportunity for Tom to explain what he means by "ugly sentence". Thus feedback comments inscribe institutionally structured practices – locating writing as part of the learning process rather than as an assessed final product.

## **4.4 Diane**

### *4.4.1 Working at New University (2)*

Diane, in her forties, is a Senior Lecturer in Sports Science at one of the two 'New' Universities in the study [NU2] (see 3.5.1), having worked in this institution for many years. The programmes Diane teaches on are completely modular, so students come to her modules with varied previous school and university subject experience. Diane teaches undergraduate modules in her scientific disciplinary specialism, other science-based modules and a more general level one module introducing the field of Sports Science. When asked about the proportion of teaching, research and administration in her work, she responds in terms of institutional monitoring: "I always put down a hundred per cent teaching on my audits". However, in addition to her teaching responsibilities, in interviews Diane also highlights her role as an Academic Conduct Officer (ACO); this involves chairing "interviews" with students suspected of "assessment offences", preparing recommendations for the Exam Board on the basis of her findings, and suggesting teaching and learning strategies to the Board which might prevent recurrences. As an ACO, Diane has a detailed knowledge of guidelines and procedures around writing in her institution. She frequently makes use of a quasi-legal vocabulary in relation to this role, for example "offence" and "breach".

### *4.4.2 The writing students do for Diane*

The writing that undergraduates do in Diane's subject areas depends heavily on their module choices, ranging from the highly scientific to those more linked to vocational practice like Sports Coaching. Diane compares two first year modules

she is involved with. One is 100% assessed through multiple choice questions, while, “at the other extreme”, another has a series of written assignments, over the entire first year, with feedback at different stages. This culminates in a completed portfolio, including learning diary entries and short (600-word) essays. Diane also sets lab reports for her specialist modules; longer, more discursive essays in applied subjects, and supports a number of students writing final year dissertations in her specialist field. She frequently mentions grammar, spelling and academic referencing when commenting on all of these different genres and levels of study. Assessment and writing are not quite synonymous in Diane’s context – because an increasing proportion of assessments incorporate other modes: oral presentations, posters and photo-stories for example – but all the student writing she raises in interviews is summatively assessed.

#### *4.4.3 Work around student writing*

Routine practices around assessment - setting assignment titles, preparing students, advising students at drafting stage, marking and returning work and discussing it with students afterwards - predominate in Diane’s accounts of her practice in connection with student writing. Diane strives to be both fair and accountable for any judgments she makes on written work (which is, wherever possible, marked anonymously). This entails a lot of time-consuming activity. For example, in one case where there are sixty assignments, Diane prefers to “mark them all”, although she could share this work with colleagues, “so that they’re all marked fairly and consistently”. She adopts detailed procedures to “objectify the process” of awarding grades. First, she jots notes down on a separate piece of paper about how an assignment rates against each criterion; these are then

converted into structured written feedback, and used to decide a level for each criterion. These levels are then fed into a spreadsheet devised by Diane which calculates a final percentage based on different weightings. Diane passes a couple of the earliest-marked assignments to a colleague, informally, to check if marks seem appropriate. Before deciding on grades, Diane again goes through and checks that she is happy that she has awarded similar grades to assignments of similar quality, partly to counter the effect of marking a large number of assignments in smaller batches of three or five at a time:

*You've got to go back and check and make sure that you're not feeling a bit better today and not had a rough day that's going to affect your judgment.*

Diane marks "in batches of maybe six at a time at the most" because she cannot bear to mark more than this in one go. This work is usually done at her kitchen table, at home in the evening, "when the children have gone to bed", partly because she finds it hard "to focus on [her] marking whilst sitting in her office and at [her] desk". A sample of the assignments is then handed to another colleague for formal moderation before Diane assigns a grade and returns the assignment to the student. The final grade is not awarded until the external examiner has viewed ten per cent of the scripts.

However, not every aspect of Diane's practice around student writing we talk about is entirely routine for her. She refers several times in interviews to her own "process of ageing and developing" as an academic teacher and has begun to step outside the safe boundaries she is used to, and to ask students to do the



same. For example, Diane has for the first time set students what she describes as a “woolly” assignment title, which she hopes will encourage them to “come back to me and let me know what they think and understand about sport and exercise science”. Diane tells me that this new assignment takes her out of her “comfort zone”, suggesting a more risky experience for both tutor and students around the writing and reading of an academic text:

*When I'm marking it I have to be quite open to allow them that creativity and for them to go off in [a] different direction ... so that was a little bit of a departure for me from the very mechanical ... lab report, introduction, method, results.*

Diane's work as an ACO “feeds into modules that [she] teach[es]” and informs her work as an academic teacher around student writing in Sports Science. In our second interview, she shares a series of documents relating to a case of suspected collusion and data falsification, where she was the academic teacher putting the case forward for formal review by another ACO (see Figure 2). Diane has painstakingly colour-coded the texts of two students' entire assignments in order to show the extent of their similarity. She has also annotated particular sections, for example where the students' texts contain the same formatting errors, and has given information about the “Suspected Collusion/Plagiarism and Fabrication” in the relevant section of the top sheet. Her familiarity with plagiarism procedures means Diane knows it is this type of hard evidence which will be of most use to the ACO who will interview the students and make a recommendation to the Board.

12/10/2008

*each match  
odd words different*

*similarities  
especially in structure  
and beginning sections*

**Notational Analysis of Badminton.**

- Notational analysis is defined as, "An objective way of recording performances so that key elements of that performance can be quantified in a valid and consistent manner", (Hughes, 2004) it is a quantitative method of analysis and can be used to improve an individuals or teams performance.
- In this project, a men's singles badminton match was viewed and recorded using the notational system in order to find out which winning shot was most and least successful. The standard of play was high level county and therefore should gather a good understanding of badminton tactics from the shots played and won.
- Racket sports have been found to be highly suitable for the use of notational analysis as the players are constantly involved with the game, regarding badminton, notational analysis can be a vital tool to both the player and the

- The aim of this report is to identify which shot is most successful at winning the payer a point and also which was least successful.
- Using the system which was outlined in the proposal, data was collected from the notational analysis system, which was then analysed. By analysing the data and producing correct tables and graphs it can allow for conclusions and interpretations to be made about the data collected.
- This can go towards helping a coach or the player themselves to indicate strengths and weaknesses in their game and either utilise the strengths and/or improve of their weaknesses, providing the player with a better all round game.

- To collect the appropriate data a match was recorded using a video camera and then uploaded onto the computer software in order to complete the notational analysis. The match itself was a men's singles match between two high level county players in a competitive environment. The notation itself focused on only one of the players and his winning shots.
- Once the video had been uploaded onto the computer, the software to analyse the match was edited to suit the particular notational system designed. The flow chart that was designed in the proposal was added to the software, this shows a series of possible events which could occur during the match, to perform this it involves pressing the button each time an event occurs from the flow chart. This allows you too watch the match and record information as it occurs.

- Using the software, the first button is clicked depending on whether the shot is executed with a forehand or a backhand stroke. The next button will be the type of shot played e.g. A smash, drop, kill etc and the third will be the outcome of the shot, whether it be a winner, or an unforced or forced error by the opponent.
- For this analysis, a winner is defined as a point which isn't reached by the player. An example of an unforced error would be where the opponent isn't put under pressure by the players shot and should return the shot with ease, where as a forced error would be if the individual plays a shot where the opponent is under pressure e.g. Reaching/diving for a shuttle. These last two events are vital as the shot and the outcome are directly linked with the aim of the study, which is analysing most and least successful winning shots.

Figure 2: Diane: extract from colour-coded "Suspected breach" report  
See Appendix L(3)

Alertness to the dangers of plagiarism sometimes shapes Diane's perceptions of student writing. For example, she describes her response where something is said "beautifully without a single error" as one of immediate suspicion. Internet technologies are framed as threats in this respect: Diane comments that in their writing students:

*need to tell us why they know that and how they know that so ... what they're telling us hasn't just been cut and paste from the Internet.*

Warnings about plagiarism are an important component, for Diane, of subject-specific guidance in module handbooks:

*There's pages of guidelines about the assessment in various different forms, like the dishonest means and the plagiarism and all that sort of warning.*

Alongside a concern with plagiarism is a parallel focus for Diane on attribution and referencing, which she mentions over twenty times during the two interviews.

#### *4.4.4 Working relationships around writing*

Where student writing is concerned, relationships with colleagues can be a helpful source of professional development for Diane. She refers to current debates amongst staff, for example about what can legitimately be expected of student writing on vocational courses, and it is clear from interviews that she has been influenced by some of these discussions. On the other hand, in her role as an ACO, Diane can find differences of opinion amongst colleagues to be a source of

difficulty. For example, procedural rules require tutors to formally refer *all* suspected “breaches” no matter how minor, including what Diane calls “first offences”. However, she acknowledges that many tutors probably just write their warning in feedback to students, rather than referring the case on to the ACO. This she finds frustrating, as difficulty then arises if what is apparently tolerated in one module is then raised as an alleged offence in another. This variation in how the plagiarism policy and procedure is implemented by different academic teachers threatens the fairness of the system for Diane, making her job as ACO more difficult.

Diane tries to be “as conscientious as [she] can” in her approach to students’ assessed writing. This reflects her sense of accountability in pedagogic relationships and the way these are structured in the institutional context. For example, the way she describes her feedback around the criteria, and her marginal comments, indicate that they are shaped by anticipation of being held to account by a student:

*I think I do it [give feedback] so that if they come and say why is this a B and not an A then I’ve got something to refer to.*

Anticipation of possible comeback from students also helps to explain her unusual (in this study) preference for marking “predictable” assignments where she knows what she is looking for, such as a series of lab reports on the same topic, to marking more “creative” pieces of work such as dissertations. Diane’s feedback-giving practice is not only designed to prepare herself against an anticipated

student response: she also explains that while giving feedback she is aware that the external examiner may later on be looking at these marked scripts for justifications for the grade. In some cases Diane experiences a tension between her responsibilities towards students and towards meeting professional standards. For example, she says of her routine practice of comparing similar scripts within a set with each other (rather than only against the criteria): “I know I’m not supposed to do that”. This suggests a tension for Diane between doing what she feels is right and best for students, and what she is “supposed” to do: her sense of what is fair with regard to the assessment of student writing appears to pull her in two directions.

### Snip No. 3: Diane’s feedback

Diane randomly selects one of a “pile” of first year assignments she has been marking to discuss in our second interview. This consists of a standard institutional assignment top sheet, completed by hand with a 100-word summary of feedback, together with the student’s marked assignment. Below are two extracts from the student’s first paragraph and Diane’s accompanying pencilled comments.

not really true!

Biomechanics is a relatively new discipline of sport science and not known about it outside of the world of sport. Biomechanists work closely with athletes and coaches trying to maximise the performance through different techniques by analysing different aspects of performance. Examples of these aspects are the analysis of movement (kinematics), the analysis of force (kinetics), analysis of performance (muscle mechanics) and sometimes the use of maths and n

performance (modelling). Further areas of analysis that a biomechanist aid a performer could be; technical analysis, injury and its prevention equipment can affect performance. Throughout the essay I will the kinematics, kinetics and muscle mechanical aspects in which can aid sporting performance and also how injury can be prevented

try to avoid using first person, 'I' or 'we'.

#### See Appendix L(4)

The comments included above are typical of other remarks given throughout the assignment in their hedged modality (“not really true” rather than “not true” or “no!”; “try to avoid using” rather than a bare imperative). These, like the choice to use erasable pencil in case of “mistakes”, seem to reflect Diane’s generally tentative approach. Interview discussion throws further light on Diane’s choice not to be categorical on the point of the first person:

*If they say ‘I’m going to do this in this essay’ I will say ‘try and avoid using first person, the ‘I’ or the ‘my’ or ‘our’ or whatever’. I don’t say it’s not right to do it but I just say ‘try and avoid that style of writing if you can’ ... that’s been drummed into me as a student and as a tutor ... and yet when you look at journal articles in this discipline (.) people do use ‘we’ ... so it’s interesting that sort of rule that we have and it’s not something that’s followed.*

Diane has always treated the requirement to avoid the first person as a fixed rule in her own writing in this scientific sub-discipline, seeing it as an aspect of her “traditionalist” approach. But her experience of academic writing in the field belies the notion of a single rule and a single style, and she is reluctant therefore to present this as a clear-cut issue to students. One possible consequence may be that students are unsure of how their choices are being judged, since although Diane’s word choices suggest alternatives are possible, on the other hand, she does suggest that the style they adopt will affect them in terms of whether “they get an A or B or something like that”.

## **4.5 Sue**

### *4.5.1 Working at a Distance Learning University*

Sue, in her fifties, teaches for Distance Learning University (DLU). She works part time from her cottage home in a 'picture postcard' English coastal village, tutoring Science and Environmental Science to groups of 15-25 undergraduates at levels one and two. During the period of research, it was not unusual for Sue to be tutoring several groups a year, with staggered course start dates; DLU is currently her only employer. Her main responsibilities are to deliver monthly face-to-face group tutorials; to support students via online forum, e-mail and telephone; and to mark coursework assignments, which all contribute to formal assessment outcomes. Sue has worked in the role for a number of years: she is viewed by colleagues and views herself as highly experienced. Her academic field is Geology, but her current employment does not involve research.

Sue's distance learning context means she has no direct input to the curriculum, materials or structure of the programme, or in setting assessments. Her role is to help students negotiate their way through course materials, and to assist them in interpreting formal assessment requirements. Sue therefore works with institutional guidance, strictures and provisions made by the university's "central academics", many of whom Sue may only rarely, if ever, meet in person. Students sit exams, but Sue does not set, or administer these. In this institutional context, Sue and an individual student may never meet, since attendance at tutorials is optional. Hence, submission of assignments and their return to the student with grade and commentary is a central part of the communicative exchange between teacher and learner. At DLU, coursework is not marked anonymously: she knows

the name of the student-writer, and will mark a series of assignments by the same person. She is therefore in a position to compare an assignment with others completed before it, and to comment on students' response to feedback and progress through the course.

#### 4.5.2 *The writing students do for Sue*

On all the courses Sue teaches, single coursework assignments are typically made up of multiple sections, where each section involves a separate task related to an overall theme. Some will involve calculations, using and making tables and graphs; however, a large proportion of answers also involve writing in the verbal sense, either in the form of short answers or in more extended pieces of writing, for example of 4-600 words, which Sue calls "short essays" (e.g. see Figure 3); for level two and three courses students may be required to write single texts of up to 2,000 words.

(a) Write an account of the South American Plate and its relationships with adjacent plates in terms of:

- (i) the ages of the continental and oceanic crusts that make up the South American Plate,
- (ii) the type of plate boundary between the South American Plate and each of its neighbouring plates, considering each plate in turn,
- (iii) the presence of any hot spots within the South American Plate.

You should not use any material from sources other than the [redacted] course materials in preparing your answer and you should state which figures from Book 2 you have used to obtain the information given in your answer. (*We expect you will be able to answer the whole of part (a) in no more than 400 words.*)

**Figure 3: Sue: extract from "short essay" level one assignment**



#### *4.5.3 Work around student writing*

The work Sue describes in interviews and that I observe/read/hear about is almost totally focused on students' assessed writing. During the observed level one tutorial session, Sue spends some time helping students with non-assessed note-taking, for example she shows them how to use different visual layouts such as the flow chart or the "double bubble" to organise their ideas. However, this activity is framed overtly as an "intermediate stage" between reading and assessed written tasks.

Another handout Sue provides illustrates that she also devotes time in level two tutorials to "study skills" advice including how to write coursework answers. Tutor group forum messages often concern past and forthcoming written assignments. However, by far the bulk of the work Sue does around student writing consists of giving written feedback: "that's when I see my role really kicking in". She collects assignments electronically, reads on screen and adds comments using 'track changes', completes electronic feedback forms and returns grades, scripts and feedback through an electronic system. The assignment is then also available for collection by the University's moderation system, which selects assignments for moderation.

One recurrent theme in relation to this work is Sue's sense of the time it takes, especially the marking and feedback element. She often contrasts the time marking actually takes her with the notional average time of forty-five minutes she believes is allocated by the institution for marking a standard (1,500-2,000 word) undergraduate assignment. For example:

*The long essays are horrendously long to mark ... if you say forty-five minutes forget it, it's twice that length.*

Sue sometimes finds that centrally provided frameworks such as marking schemes have time-saving potential. In other cases, *extra* time may be involved. For example, the new electronic feedback summary form takes Sue longer to complete than the previous paper version, because there is no character or word limit - you can just "go on and on". Sue also associates extra time for marking with students whose need for support with writing is too great:

*Suddenly I'm a [foundation course] tutor on a level two course and there's only so many hours you can do.*

#### *4.5.4 Working relationships around writing*

Sue talks of feeling pressured by a sense of mismatch between expectations placed on her by the institution and the practical limits of time available. For example, she talks about moderators (i.e. 'peer' monitors of grading and feedback) who appear somewhat out of touch with her pragmatic reality:

*I object when people ... have a go at me when I'm feeling I can't do more.*

Just as Sue sees a conflict between *student* needs and the institution's perception of the time involved in reading, grading and giving feedback on assignments, she

also sometimes invokes *institutional* rigidities and requirements when attempting to challenge student's perceptions of her time flexibility and availability. For example, early in a level one course, she posts a message to her students:

Dear all,

An important note to say that it is a risky practice ... to send [assignments] in well into the night of the deadline ... but better to submit no later than the afternoon or early evening. This leaves me with enough time to contact any student with a format problem for example, as I cease work by 8pm ... this is the first assignment so I have stayed up well beyond my bedtime. Any [assignment] that is in the incorrect format and not rectified before the deadline passes is designated as not submitted and therefore not marked.

Sue

[Posting on electronic forum for her group of students.]

In the phrase "well beyond my bedtime", Sue is using an element of humour to communicate her own working realities to students, in an effort to manage their expectations of her flexibility as the course progresses; she is also alerting them to institutional strictures around submission of assignments, which she signals (for example, by her use of the passive voice and formal institutional vocabulary in the phrase "is designated as not submitted") as being beyond her control.

There are other conflicts for Sue around student writing in terms of her relationship with the institution. She sometimes expresses concern that her professional standing with students may be undermined by some institutional procedures. For example:

*A big issue for me as a tutor is if the software picks up the plagiarism and I do, but I'm not allowed to comment in case I'm wrong ... the University is obviously worried about legal action. How professional do I look that the software picked it up but I appear not to have done?*

At other times Sue downplays her authority and status, and positions herself in alignment with students, empathizing with their struggles. For example, in a group tutorial I observed, she talks to students about the “little things” involved in academic writing, such as the need to use italics for the Latin names of species, which “you learn as you go through”. To back up her point, she tells them of her own experiences as a PhD student:

*I wish I'd had that [knowledge] at the beginning of my research in '92 because I would've avoided a lot of embarrassing situations... I'm passing this on to you now [so] that later on you will find it very useful.*

Sue adds the example of “doing platform presentations with the wrong conventions”. Working relationships around students' texts clearly involve a series of dynamic tensions for Sue. In her experiences of feedback-giving, assessment

and moderation, her sense of professional status in relation to students is tempered by a sense that her authority may be fragile with respect to her position in the institution as a whole. At the same time, she exploits the relative lack of hierarchy between herself and students pedagogically, using it to help them feel understood and reassured about their academic writing.

#### Snip no. 4: Sue's feedback

**Sustainable Lifestyle** – managing available resources so that not more is taken than is needed as you would then have waste, replace what has been used to maintain the cycle and not to take more than is available as it could struggle to reproduce. This covers all the salient points, well done.

Could you see ways of improving the phrasing as it reads a bit disjointed

Manage available resources so that not more used than is needed and not harm the environment. Replenish as much as possible to ensure there are resources available for future generations.

Sue's usual practice is to carefully distinguish her own feedback commentary from the words supplied by "central academics", through the use of different fonts or colours on student scripts, because she regards it as "only professional" not to pass off others' words as your own. In this extract from a first year assignment, her own comment is in red and text provided by the central course team is in blue. There are also times when she finds the model text provided by central course teams inadequate, especially where the Geology parts of the courses are concerned, and therefore edits it, carefully flagging this through different colours and fonts. Sue also talks about the advantages of being able to relinquish authority at times for the wording of such texts:

*If you want to take issue with that [feedback text taken from course model answers] I can just say 'nothing to do with me'... if it's in red I put my hands up and say shoot me!*

Sue paraphrases the moderator's response to her feedback on this assignment as "I do hope that the student will bother to read [it] because there is so much on the feedback sheet". Sue appears unhappy with this response, and appears to read it as a dismissal of her efforts.

## **4.6 Deborah**

### *4.6.1 Working at a Post-92 University*

Deborah is a Professor in History at Post-1992 University (P92U), a former polytechnic which acquired university status in 1992. She spent "many years" as Head of Department, teaching a wide range of courses, until stepping down recently to "concentrate on research". She still plays an active role teaching undergraduates. She estimates that she spends approximately two thirds of her time on teaching, including curriculum planning, and one third on research. Conversations with Deborah and other data suggest that she takes both research and teaching very seriously, and that they compete fiercely for her time, often at personal cost:

*We're all exhausted and I don't know how much longer it can go on.*

Her department declares its commitment to teaching on its website, alerting readers to its “top ten” performance in the National Student Survey. Deborah proudly refers to this success during interviews. When we met, the History building was on a small site three miles from the main campus, on the edge of a large urban park. The sequestered atmosphere was reinforced by the way Deborah talked about her department’s relations with the wider university:

*We’re on a different site, and we do a different sort of thing in a different sort of way.*

In interviews, Deborah’s teaching on a “core” compulsory level two module is the main focus of discussion. She also “help[s] out” on first year courses outside her area of specialist expertise. Along with colleagues, she is in the process of revising the curriculum for next year, partly in response to student feedback. Deborah also tells me that anonymous marking was introduced in the institution in response to student concerns about favouritism and prejudice. Deborah’s experience of work around student writing emerges as taking place against an apparently continuously changing background.

#### *4.6.2 The writing students do for Deborah*

Deborah’s departmental website explains to enquirers:

We use a wide variety of assessment methods including essays, extended essays, document tests and exercises, assessed

seminar papers, individual and group presentations, book and/or periodical reviews, internet-based research, projects, a dissertation and end of year examinations.

[Departmental website, accessed 19<sup>th</sup> January 2011.]

In interview, although she emphasises that students are asked to do “lots of other things” too, Deborah comments that in practice, the “default model” of academic writing required is

*the two and a half thousand word essay with the usual stuff about introductions and conclusions and logical development of argument and referencing and so forth.*

Although the essay is “default” in her context, in interviews Deborah mostly talks about the work she does on a second level module in which traditional essays do not feature; she describes its main purpose as “training students to write dissertations”. Thus students can gain formal credit for process and progress towards a written product as well as for the product itself. Individual written portfolio tasks (e.g. bibliographic exercises, examining archive material) are submitted in chunks throughout the first semester, building to a total of 4-5,000 words. Deborah describes the process as one of “constant formative improvement”: feedback is given on each task and students may completely redraft before the portfolio is finally assessed. On the other hand, failure on this module means that a student will not be permitted to write a dissertation at level



three. Thus the module also involves a summative process of “weed[ing] out” “in advance”. The other assignment for this module is a report or “briefing paper”, submitted only once, although Deborah stresses that there are a lot of “iterative assessment” tasks leading up to the assignment on which students receive feedback.

#### *4.6.3 Work around student writing*

Deborah runs the second year module to maximise opportunities for discussion using small-group “workshop” classroom approaches, longer sessions, and one-to-one consultations both prior to submission and following assessment. In this and other modules, work around student writing for Deborah seems to signify a great deal of time and effort:

*To prepare students adequately to write well, which includes giving detailed thoughtful feedback on what they have written, takes a lot of time ... in arts subjects, you need to spend a lot of time looking in detail at how students have expressed themselves.*

Deborah also frequently articulates a sense of her work as a reciprocation of the students’ own efforts in their writing. For example, while we are discussing a marked assignment in which her feedback text is almost as long as the student’s in some sections, Deborah comments: “I feel if they’re putting the work in ... I owe it to them to take it seriously.” When probed a little further she adds:

*Most of the students work really hard on this ... and if they just get something back that says it's not good enough, that's not fair ... they've worked hard so it's up to me to work hard.*

Deborah even suggests that her effort in itself is a form of guidance and teaching, directing students' attention to what is important:

*The fact that I make such a fuss ... and go to all this kind of detail, I can be seen to be putting energy into this, also gives a signal that this is actually important and it might lead them to think 'well why is this so important?'*

As well as hard work, there are also glimpses of Deborah's enjoyment of what students have to say in their written work, especially where the topic area is new to her, which is particularly the case in the second year dissertation module, in which she tells me "over the years I've learned an enormous amount."

#### *4.6.4 Working relationships around writing*

Another important source of satisfaction for Deborah is in seeing her impact on students' learning. She returns her detailed feedback to them in face-to-face meetings so:

*I can go through the comments with them and I can see the (.) cogs turning in their brains, that's a wonderful satisfaction from that.*

Although Deborah expresses support for the anonymous marking system in her institution, most of the assessed writing she talks about for the study is not assessed anonymously, including the marked second year portfolios she shares at our second interview. Deborah feels that for “something like this” it is important to know the student and whether to chide them to work harder or to be more understanding. Deborah seems to particularly value the opportunity to talk formatively on a personal level with students about their work, something that is less easy to achieve where written assessment is strictly anonymous. The opportunity to see evidence of the fruits of her labours in face-to-face interaction with students can transmute duty into pleasure for Deborah. However, throughout interviews she also expresses concern that her efforts to communicate with students about their academic writing will be wasted. She says she is “travelling hopefully” and frequently refers to her hopes - or doubts - that students will read feedback, that it will “sink in” or that students will even attend face-to-face feedback meetings with her to discuss their writing. She describes her detailed written feedback as “an *attempt* to be in conversation with the student” [my emphasis]. These comments suggest a sense of failure to be heard by students. Deborah thus seems to aspire to a version of pedagogic relations around writing that she feels is rarely realised.

Even where such a dialogic pedagogy proves possible, in interviews Deborah suggests it goes unrecognized beyond the History Department:

*We know what we do is very good, I'm not at all sure that the University knows that.*

*There is a big University event at the end of this month ... I'm not being asked to ... share our expertise in any way ... I'm only there because I said I would do it, nobody came and asked us to send someone.*

Conflicts around approaches to student writing also surfaced in intra-departmental relations for Deborah. Colleagues attached differing degrees of importance to “content” and “skills” within History, and this was actively debated during curriculum planning:

*Where we disagree as a department is that there are some of us who think it doesn't actually matter that much what the content is ... whereas there are other colleagues that say that there is stuff that [students] just need to know, there is content that is non-negotiable ... so we're just talking at cross-purposes.*

However, Deborah's approach on the core module also entails *co-operation* with colleagues within the discipline. For example, there is close working between Deborah as module tutor and colleagues likely to take students on for third level dissertation work, who act as expert “second markers” for the briefing paper assignment. Despite these individual collaborations on specific assignments, Deborah comments that dialogue between colleagues around student writing is limited, not only at university-wide level, but within her department: “we have talked about the fact that we don't talk about it.” Overall, Deborah's account presents a picture of working relationships in which individuals are free to continue with their own, preferred practices, unless these are trounced by institutional edict. Even as Head of Department, she seems to feel she has little scope to challenge

colleagues, despite some dissatisfactions with the practices of others. For example, a newer, more junior member of the department has adopted a personal policy of not giving any feedback at all on students' scripts. Despite her senior position, Deborah has not challenged him to modify his practices.

#### Snip No. 5: Deborah's feedback

*In the second letter, for example it appears that the British prime minister has described Russia opinion as 'moderate'.*

No!!! Not at all!!!! Read it again. (It is the THIRD letter...). The writer is pointing out that there are double standards - *Kennedy's* action [not 'opinion'] was described as 'moderate' by the British govt, but a *hypothetical* comparable action by the USSR in comparable circumstances (ie a Soviet blockade of shipping heading to Scotland, in protest at the nuclear missiles in Scotland) would *not* have been described as 'moderate'.

This is short extract from a series of extensive paragraphs of feedback on a second year History portfolio assignment. The student has written approximately 3,200 words; Deborah has added 2,000 words of feedback in colour. Over the course of the assignment, Deborah appears to become increasingly frustrated with the student's work. This emotive dimension of Deborah's experience of marking is not overtly expressed in words but is strongly hinted at in non-verbal aspects of her written feedback, for example here it is signalled by a gradual crescendo of non-Standard punctuation such as many exclamation marks, and the use of block capitals and italics for stress. These features strike me as an attempt to convey elements of the spoken voice in written form. The exaggerated punctuation, along with her use of imperatives such as "Read it again", seem to indicate that Deborah feels her advice is not 'getting through': there is a sense of failure of 'take up', perhaps a failure of 'voice' in the sense used by Blommaert (2005: 68-78).

## 4.7 Concluding comments

The five accounts above in some ways indicate the variety and complexity of practices around student writing which emerged in the study. Individuals had their own working routines, understandings and values relating to these activities, and were very often aware of the differences between their own and colleagues' approaches. Individuals' approaches to work with student writing were bound up with a complex series of contextual factors. Each participant was actively working to balance a particular configuration of cost and benefit, opportunity and constraint, and to position themselves through their practice around student writing in relation to what counts (or not) in their institutional context.

Despite the great variety embodied in these five accounts, some clear thematic patterns emerge. In the chapters which follow, I weave these themes together through an exploration of the experiences of all fourteen participants in the study. One emerging theme is time: the practices of the five participants represented here often took shape amidst conflicts over the ways they should be spending precious time, dilemmas heightened when it came to work around student writing, because this was felt to be a particularly time-consuming aspect of academic work. Time and timing are important contributors to another thread running through these accounts – the distinctly mixed feelings which participants have towards their work with student writing. On one hand they talk of enthusiasm and engagement and the pleasure of seeing the impact on students; more frequently they speak of dread, boredom, frustration and doubt about whether their efforts will 'get through' to students. In section 6.2, I bring together issues of time, effort, impact and reward, articulated in terms of the *resourcing* of work with student

writing, connecting this with broader questions of the marginality of writing work experienced by many participants.

All of the themes identified above are not simply played out in what these academic teachers *do*, but are also intimately bound up with who they *are*: with how they see themselves and are seen by others in their contexts. As individual accounts in this chapter show, marginal work can be experienced as marginalising to the individuals who undertake it (for example, for Sue and Deborah). Thus practices around student writing involve questions of professional identity, in turn linked to ways in which different identities are valued by participants and by others in their contexts. This connection between practice around writing and identity emerged across the study, and is revisited in greater detail in section 6.3.

Another theme running through the individual accounts in this chapter is that work around student writing involves complex relationships between teachers and their students, amongst colleagues and between individual teachers and their institutions. These relationships are negotiated, not fixed, and are signalled through and shaped by individuals' practices around student writing. More often than not, individuals do not feel able or willing to actively engage others in improving the work that is done with student writers. Higher managers seem remote from everyday practice. Relationships external to the institution can have an impact on practice too. Collegial, professional and pedagogic relationships around writing, particularly questions of autonomy and collaboration, are revisited in greater depth in section 6.4.

A pattern also emerges in the foregoing accounts of diversity *within* the practice repertoire of individuals. Participants represented in this chapter were sometimes highly aware that there were different ‘pockets’ of their work with student writers. These differences arose from complex trade-offs between what was desirable and what was possible at different times. Section 6.5 explores further the dynamic relationship between individuals’ practice around student writing and the contexts within which they are operating. Diversity was not only discernible at the level of individual pedagogic style or repertoire. Some broader institutional fault lines seem to be exposed in these accounts: most obviously the difference between the writing-intensive, yet in some ways highly informal Oxbridge context of Tom and his students, in which formal assessment hardly figured in his role as College-based teacher of Law. In Chapter 5, I explore in greater detail the role of institutional assessment regimes in shaping practices around student writing.



## **Chapter 5: Practice around student writing in the context of institutional assessment regimes**

### ***5.1 Introduction: the strong presence of formal assessment***

Four of the five accounts of individual practice in Chapter 4 invoke university contexts in which *almost all* writing which students do ‘for’ their academic teachers counts towards formal assessment outcomes. In this chapter, I build on this emerging picture of formal assessment as a strong presence shaping many participants’ practices around writing. Wherever a link between writing and assessment was a well-established part of institutional ‘common sense’, local and sector-wide discourses of assessment in higher education seemed to impinge heavily on participants’ understandings of their responsibilities with regard to student writing. This link brought to the fore other aspects of practice, such as issues of anonymous assessment, fairness and accountability in judging students’ written work, and the risks of getting both writing and assessment ‘wrong’. In this chapter I explore these themes as threads weaving across the study. Robert, at P92U, coined a vivid phrase in a draft of a departmental newsletter to describe the strong presence of formal assessment in his context, calling it “the tyranny of assessment”. Analysis in this chapter provides evidence of a similar sense amongst other participants that the connection between writing and assessment in their contexts is constraining, and not always productive. This chapter explores in greater depth the ways in which practice was influenced by assessment regimes in individuals’ different universities, and so points to the significance of institutional contexts in profoundly shaping practice around student writing.

I begin in section 5.2 with a discussion of exceptions to the general pattern of the dominance of formal assessment. This is followed in section 5.3 with an analysis of how participants made sense of writing-related practices designed to ensure *fairness* through ‘objectivity’ and ‘transparency’ in written assessment, such as criteria-based grading and anonymous marking. Participants’ concerns over fairness were closely linked to notions of *risk* for student writers, a theme explored in section 5.4 along with its converse, ‘playing safe’. Questions of fairness and of safety dovetail with a third preoccupation, explored in section 5.5: that of *accountability* around writing and written assessment in university contexts. These themes emerged during the weaving process of analysis, reading for patterns discernible across the data for all fourteen participants, drawing on interviews, texts, recorded observations and field notes.

Although it is useful to stand back in order to grasp broader patterns, it is also important to keep sight of the particularities of individuals’ work around student writing as situated practice; therefore at intervals throughout the chapter I have illustrated the knotty and sometimes contradictory complexities of practice through a series of four ‘Windows’, each centred on one participant and a specific text relating to assessed writing.<sup>19</sup> These explorations add to the thick descriptions of individual practice introduced in Chapter 4, connect with the thematic discussion in

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<sup>19</sup> Scollon (2001: 5) describes social practice as unfolding in unique “sites of engagement” which are “real time window[s]” ... “opened through an intersection of social practices and mediational means”.

this chapter, and with later discussions in section 6.5, where I explore the complex and dynamic nature of the relationship between participants' practice and their institutional contexts.

## ***5.2 Exceptions to the 'rule' of 'student writing = formally assessed writing'***

There were some small exceptions in the study to the overall assessment-dominated pattern of practice around student writing. For example, Deborah (P92U) described a series of “workshops” where History students jointly created and shared short texts. They were studying social class: the first workshop of the series was about the “upper classes” and students wrote introductions to essay questions on this topic

*so that we were making them really think about the issues ... but they were also thinking about how do you write a good introduction*

The second session was about the middle classes/structuring the “main body” of an assignment, the third about the working classes/conclusions. This activity was not connected to a specific assessment, but did take place “just before the first essay was due in”. For Robert (also P92U) it was extremely important not to

*give in to purely assessment-driven activity, 'cause I don't think that's education, personally.*

He had devised an experimental exercise where two hundred Geography students were given a pack of “entertaining” and “exciting” reading materials and asked to précis them over some weeks; Robert read their précis but gave no feedback or assessment, formal or otherwise, hoping that students would read for the “joyful engagement” it offered. In both examples, non-assessed writing activities held a precarious position: in Deborah’s case for financial reasons (see 6.2.1), while Robert felt that, despite a good student response, his module would get him “slammed” by external examiners who would not understand what he was trying to do.

Two more sustained exceptions to the overall “tyranny of the pink sheet”<sup>20</sup> (Robert,) in the study were the OBU-based cases of Tom and Angela. Although very different from each other as academic teachers, their work was shaped by a shared contextual factor, which is that, after first year exams, students are not formally assessed until they take final examinations. This type of ‘assessment ecology’ loosens the connection between the writing students do for their academic teachers, and formal assessment outcomes (see Window 1: 181)<sup>21</sup>. In the discussion which follows, data from these participants provided an interesting counterpoint to other findings, and serve to re-emphasise the dominance of formal assessment for most, while pointing to a key institutional difference shaping participants’ practice around student writing.

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<sup>20</sup> A reference to his institution’s requirement that all assessed work should have a pink cover sheet.

<sup>21</sup> Although there is still a great deal at stake for some students when writing coursework (see 4.3.2).

### **Window No. 1: Angela's two hand-marked essays**

Angela is near completion of a doctorate in Anthropology at OBU; she teaches small groups of undergraduates part time, a supplementary role she has taken on to broaden her experience of academic teaching. We discuss two second year students' essays: they are asked to discuss a short quotation in relation to "rites of passage", one of their topics for the term.

Angela has set the essay at the weekly tutorial; most students have handed in a paper copy via her College pigeonhole the day before their next tutorial. One of these students has taken up her offer to look at drafts before they submit and has sent her an opening paragraph for comment every week this term. Although Angela applauds his conscientiousness, she is starting to feel slightly irritated with the extra work at a crucial time in her doctoral studies: to do more than prepare tutorials and mark essays is to "go above and beyond" her role. However, she also feels that students appreciate her availability and interest in teaching them, and her willingness to provide feedback – of which she receives very little from her own supervisor. Another student has written at the top of the essay "Ta Angela", presumably because she has allowed him to submit the essay very late.

Angela has marked the late essay at home sitting in bed at 3 a.m., the other in her tiny attic study room in College, also at night; they will be returned to students within twenty-four hours. Although students are supposed to write between 1-2,000 words, one of these essays is about 2,500; the other is over 3,500 words. Students have put their names on the first sheet; there is no official cover sheet or other paperwork, and the marked script will go straight back to the individual student. The essays are both thickly scattered with Angela's handwriting in the margins and between (closely spaced) lines of the students' text, together with "wordsmithing" additions, deletions, corrections, circlings, and a paragraph of evaluative feedback at the end. No grade is given. Normally Angela returns essays to students at the beginning of a tutorial, without further discussion. Their writing functions as essential preparation for face-to-face tutorials.

However, because it is the end of term, there will now be no tutorial. Angela herself is moving on, completing her doctorate and hopes to find an academic post in another UK university. She feels that the teaching has been very valuable experience, despite being the "worst paid job" she's ever had, and "if it weren't so time-consuming it would actually be just a total pleasure."

**"I see in the study of rituals the essential the way to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies" (Victor Turner). Discuss in relations to 'rites of passage'.**

The study of ritual allows anthropologists to observe beliefs and values in action. Rituals are laden with meaning both to the people who perform them and to the people who watch them. The purpose of my essay is to examine the role of ritual in societies and look at how they shape the 'essential constitution' of society. I anchor my discussion on Van Gennep's (1960) seminal work and proceed in chronological order to look at how Structuralists, like Turner, refined and built up on his work; they went beyond the functionalist interest in ritual as a socially meaningful act and inquired into the symbolism and deeper meaning of ritual. Finally, I turn to more modern approaches to ritual informed by social constructivism, the study of media and the agency of the individual in negotiating the values and meanings of society. I look at the interpretation of rituals in their contemporary theoretical contexts. I argue that ritual does give us enormous insight into the 'constitution' of societies in terms of their values, beliefs, and culture of human societies. But I argue that we need to go beyond looking at the form, function and meaning of ritual to its impacts on their spectators and participants.

Van Gennep (1960) saw rituals as acts that had a very specific social function to serve. He argued that life was made up of successive stages like birth, puberty, marriage, death etc. and that to move from one stage to another, a well-defined ceremony was needed to make the transition. Fundamentally, he observed that every ritual has a preliminal (start), liminal (middle) and a post-liminal (end), all of which are characterised by specific rituals. They have aims and they occur juxtaposed to each other. Van Gennep also noticed that at the liminal stage there is a 'pivoting of the sacred' that is marked by the inversion of social rules. At the post-liminal stage the individual is reincorporated back to society with a new social status and role in relation to others. Van Gennep compared the transitions to different stages to borders: just as crossing borders requires formalities, so does going from one state to another. Furthermore, the liminal and post-liminal phases of rites of passage often involve ritual 'purification' (cleansing/washing) to separate the individual from previous surroundings. He used the metaphor of doorways to illustrate the idea of going from one status to another. Yet, the revolutionary observation that was made, is that in rites of initiation, the biological puberty doesn't coincide with the 'social puberty'. In other words, the initiation of children into sexual life does not necessarily correlate with their biological sexual maturity. Among the Masai in Kenya, for instance, the age (from 12-16 years old) of initiation depends on the parents' wealth since it is a costly ritual: the richer the parents, the sooner the initiation, the poorer the parents, the longer they will try and put off the initiation for as long as possible. On the other hand, the fact that most initiations left a physical mark (e.g. removal of the foreskin in circumcision) was a symbolic way of asserting one's belonging to a new class.

Van Gennep's (1960) interpretation of ritual pioneered the emerging functionalist wave of anthropology. He blamed the folkloristic wave for taking rituals out of their context and merely collecting them. Van Gennep was concerned with considering rituals in their role in the dynamics of the whole of society; he emphasised the politico-legal

**Figure 4: Angela: extract from a marked essay**

**See Appendix L(5)**

### 5.3 Fairness

A key preoccupation for study participants was that of ensuring fairness in the assessment of writing. In section 5.3 I explore how they negotiated the boundaries between supporting individuals on one hand, and fairness to all on the other, through their practices around student writing, and how they understood these practices in terms of *transparency* and *objectivity* as means of achieving fairness at different stages of the assessment trajectory. These twin facets of equity were contested to different degrees in the practices of participants, and were sometimes seen as having complex consequences for pedagogic relationships and for learning, an issue raised throughout this section but in particular in section 5.3.2.

#### 5.3.1 *Transparency through explicit guidelines and criteria?*

Transparency was a key concern for participants at the outset of the assessment cycle, for example in setting out expectations for students in the form of detailed criteria. The idea that expectations of student writing should/could be made transparent through initial instructions and statements appeared to be a given for some participants. For example, Diane (NU2) describes written guidance given to students:

*There's pages of guidelines about the assessment ... then **obviously** within that there's also then the assessment criteria ... **so they know ... what they should be covering** in terms of meeting the learning outcomes [my emphasis].*

Paul, at the same institution, comments that it would not be considered fair to change the requirements which have been advertised to students once they have chosen the module as an option. Similarly, Mike (NU1) explains:

*If we've got an existing module and ... I want to bring out a ... new exciting assessment item, I can't do it in the year that it's delivered, I'm not allowed to do that for transparency to students.*

For these participants, the setting of assessments was viewed as integral to curriculum planning and module approval, and publishing assessment information in advance seen as part of the 'contract' with students.

In some participants' contexts, the idea that detailed criteria for written assessment should be set out 'clearly' in advance was less of a given. Although Emma (RGU) writes criteria for assessing written work on the module she leads, she tends to be the only one who actually uses them:

*I'm normally the one who sort of produces [marking criteria] and he [Emma's colleague] then comments on it – he's more ... the person who judges things based on a gut feeling.*



In Emma's institution, whether or not to use or to publish explicit criteria for students' written assessments is up to the individual lecturer, and Emma is comfortable with that.

Whether or not it was required or standard practice in their institution, some participants who gave detailed guidelines and assessment criteria in advance expressed doubts, when talking in depth about their experience, that these would necessarily function in 'transparent' ways. For example, in an interview discussion about a report on a practical computing task, Emma conveys awareness that although web-based guidelines are provided, this does not guarantee they are read and understood in the way that she and colleagues expect (see also 4.2.2):

*Obviously we are not telling them exactly what we want otherwise they would provide more coherent reports.*

Similarly, Deborah (P92U) expresses the view that, in written form at least, guidelines are not transparent to students:

*Mostly I talk, because they read everything I've written and they still say 'I don't understand' [laughs].*

In Sue's experience (at DLU), the learning-outcomes based assessment which is supposed to reassure students that grading has been fair, is itself dependent on

subjective judgments which are transparent neither to students nor to colleagues who might be involved in any appeals process. This is the reason she gives for writing copious feedback:

*If they haven't quite got [a particular level], it's subjective but you have to explain that to a moderator ... who might be regrading it.*

Participants also expressed ambivalence about the value, as well as the achievability, of explicitness and transparency. Some saw the desire for detailed advanced criteria as driven by students' misguided belief that in sticking closely to these they would maximise their grade. Dan's (RGU) main concern about the rise of explicit mark schemes is the danger of producing "clones". He wants to leave ample room for students' "expression":

*I don't actually offer ... strict criteria and guidelines ahead of time because ... I actually want students to demonstrate some initiative and novelty ... if I give them strict criteria they'll all provide exactly what I ask for, 'cause they're all very capable, and I won't learn anything and nor will **they** really [Dan's emphasis].*

Dan shares with me an assignment in which small groups of Geography students have to carry out and write up a practical surveying task. Assessment guidelines for students are given on an A4 sheet of instructions:

Assessment

Approx 3 sides A4 (excl. map) of text, diagrams and calculations that illustrate the strategy adopted to **estimate** the height of Grand Local Building from base of steps to top of parapet [Dan's emphasis].

However, in Dan's view some of the students have had a mistaken idea of the "aim" of the exercise. One student group has written "The aim of this exercise was to determine the height of ... "; another "Our aim was to determine the approximate height of ... "; a third "The aim of this exercise was to estimate the height of ... ". In the interview, however, Dan tells me that the main aim of the task was "actually to assess *their ability* to estimate the height" [my emphasis]. Dan believes that it is not a lack of transparency in his written instructions which causes problems for students ("Evaluation" is one of seven assessment criteria, given in writing), but the fact that only some "manage to step back and actually realize what it is they're doing". In any case, Dan's preferred strategy is to let students learn by making mistakes:

*I don't expect them to know how to produce it, it's got to go through some iterations, and they're uncomfortable with that because they like to get things right the first time.*

Deborah (P92U) also tells me that she does not favour detailed descriptors of assessment criteria, on the grounds that they tend to narrow down students' focus and prevent self-expression:

*I try not to be too prescriptive ... I won't say a first class survey essay will have done this, this and this, a 2:1 will have done this, this and this because I think students then (.) become (.) too tick-box oriented and they lose sight of the process of writing and expressing themselves.*

Martin (RGU) too is wary of providing too much in the way of explicit guidelines before students write their report for him: he believes students want

*a template, they want to know the perfect version that they can then approximate to, and I'm rather resistant to that ... I studied Social Anthropology at [Oxbridge], ... you were left to get on with it and you did it your way and you had a detailed crit then from your supervisor, and I feel that's part of the learning exercise, that's part of being at university and I don't want to give them some sort of essay by rote.*

These sentiments reflect an unease with the notion that transparency either could or should be achieved through the use of explicit guidelines and criteria, and that an attempt to pin down judgments about writing through the use of ever more detailed and explicit assessment criteria can result in students – and their academic teachers – narrowing their focus, learning little, and losing sight of what is valuable in student writing.

### 5.3.2 Transparency versus mystery

Martin's reference above to his experience as an Oxbridge undergraduate is illuminating. Angela, at OBU, sets written assignments in an environment where there are no formal outcomes and no measures to control what tasks she sets or even which topics students should cover; as she puts it: "it's all very ad hoc round here". There are no explicit criteria given to students, only a one-line question (see Figure 4 for a typical example) and a reading list. Angela feels that it is important to set questions which are reasonably difficult:

*I think ... in a way you don't want to give them questions that are too easy, because I've looked at the essay questions on their exams and they're very difficult you know, you really have to think 'what is this question asking me?', and that to me is part of the process, the whole endeavour that they're taking part in.*

These words of Angela's in interview echo Martin's resistance to what he calls writing "by rote", which neither believe is the "learning exercise" of higher education as it should be. In their practices, these individuals are working through important questions about where the line should be drawn between productive educational puzzlement on one hand, and the "institutional practice of mystery" (Lillis, 1999, 2001) on the other. At what point do attempts to demystify academic writing e.g. by being explicit about expectations, become counterproductive and squeeze the life and learning out of assessed writing for academic teachers and students? Which puzzles and mysteries are educationally valuable, and which are simply a barrier to those not already 'in the know'?

Data from this study show that these questions can only be answered in terms of specific contexts. In the Oxbridge environment, face-to-face discussion between tutor and student offers the opportunity to unravel the puzzlement created by an essay question (or by a feedback comment, e.g. see Tom's Snip of feedback: 152) in the relative safety of a small group, without the pressure of formal assessment. Angela describes setting a very challenging reading (partly to help second year students engage with "anthropological writing styles"):

*We did talk about it being hard to read and how you had to persevere and they all said that they felt very, very challenged by that writing style ... so they all came into the tutorial going 'oh I just didn't get it' ... 'what was [the author] on about?' and then through the course of the tutorial they were actually realising that they understood much more than they had ... it was a lesson for me because ... I think they really got quite a lot out of it ... actually it's good to be challenged ... and kind of puzzle through and work collaboratively.*

Here, the opportunity to "puzzle through ... collaboratively" potentially raises the level of challenge students can cope with and enables them to solve the mystery of a difficult academic text in a way which satisfies them and their teacher.

### 5.3.3 Objectivity through anonymity

In the later stages of the assessment trajectory, at the point at which students' texts were marked and graded, objectivity came to the fore as a concern (see, for example, Diane's elaborate efforts to "objectify" her marking described in section

4.4.3). Anonymous assessment was used frequently in two of the five types of institution in the study (New and Post-1992) and sometimes in a third type (Russell Group), as a key means by which to promote objectivity and thus, it was generally assumed, fairness.

Where anonymous marking was the norm, participants generally oriented positively towards it, being aware of the potential to be prejudiced in assessment. For example, Deborah (P92U) remarks that anonymous scripts can sometimes surprise you when you find out who wrote them; she also sees practical advantages for her as marker:

*Particularly when I've got a huge pile of essays to mark ... if I don't know who [the student writers] are, I don't spend time worrying about whether this is an appropriate way to be responding to them, I just manage to get through them much more quickly.*

This double-edged comment also conveys Deborah's awareness that anonymity prevents teachers from attempting to respond in "an appropriate way" to individual students. Paul (NU2) likewise believes that it is fairer if markers do not know which student has produced the work:

*I think it would be inappropriate of me to have all of this [personal identifying information, previous scores, etc.] sitting in front of me.*

However, he goes on to comment on the limitations thus placed on the feedback cycle:

*But there's no doubt that I'd like to, after I've done that and made a record of the comments and the actual mark ... go back and see if there has been that progression.*

Paul appears to feel that not being able to close the feedback circle is a price worth paying for fairness, and that the main thing is that students know they are being given feedback to apply to their next piece of work, even if he as a teacher cannot trace the impact of feedback on an individual, nor comment on progress.

Overall, those participants in contexts where anonymity was part of the institutional assessment regime, viewed it as acceptable for “routine assessments” (James, NU1). Anonymity was clearly not possible for some types of non-written assessment such as oral presentations, nor with certain sorts of written assignment, such as Deborah’s second year portfolio:

*With something like this, where you're taking them through a process, and you need to be holding their hand all the way through the process, they need to know that you are holding **their** hand [Deborah's emphasis].*

In some ways this situation is reminiscent of the emphasis on process and the element of safety in a close tutoring relationship in Angela’s context.



There were many other examples of written assignments which participants talked about in interviews where an emphasis on process would have in any case precluded an anonymous approach to writing, such as Emma's (RGU) third year assignment where she meets student groups to discuss an extended abstract before they submit their final assignment (see 4.2.2). Another example is a "guided learning log" which Mike (NU1) introduced to a third year feminist Geography module, which he describes to me as "really about writing the self". In this case, a staged feedback process in which Mike gave feedback on each log entry, together with the presence of the writer in the text because of the assignment's reflective and personal focus, prevented anonymous assessment. Mike writes about his concerns over the lack of anonymity, and the potential for unfairness, in a published article addressed to disciplinary colleagues. However, Mike tells me he is reassured that overall the assessment for this module will be fair because the other "assessment item" is a "very conventional boring essay" and will be marked anonymously. He explains that the emphasis in the essay is "the sound scholarship of objective debate", so students "have got that to cling to". James, in the same department as Mike, speaks about an individual student who had boldly chosen to "claim a personal perspective" in a research essay:

*It couldn't be anonymous 'cause she'd put herself in photographs, and that breached the university's anonymity rule, but I couldn't really tell her off for it ... 'cause it was entirely in keeping with the style of inquiry so that was fine (.) it's still quite rare for a student to acquire their own voice because ... we're shoehorning them into this much more off-the-peg writing style which is safe and anonymous and impersonal.*

In these extracts both James and Mike seem to associate the more traditional type of academic written genre with anonymity in a more general sense – writing ‘objectively’ without a personal voice - an association reinforced by a sense that academic writing should be anonymised for assessment.

## Window No. 2: Russell's electronic student assignment

Russell is an experienced part-time lecturer at DLU on a level one Social Science module. We discuss a “descriptive report” he has marked via an electronic system. Russell has played no part in setting the assignment, although changes to future assignments may be made in response to comments from those like him who work directly with students. He has downloaded the assignment, submitted late with his prior permission, onto his lap top, and marked it late at night in a hotel. Russell knows the student's identity and something of her personal circumstances. He has allowed the extension because she is “struggling” and currently has a “chaotic lifestyle”: he sees this sort of flexibility as important in promoting wider access to University. Russell begins and ends the feedback with a warm personal message:

Hi \*\*\*

I am so relieved you managed to get this assignment in ...

Please keep going you are almost there. Also touch base with me for support ... good luck with Assignment no. 6.

Russell

Using highlighting and “insert comments”, he has annotated the student's script with marginal comments, deletions and insertions, all in blue. He has also added a note to the page ‘header’: “You still need to put your name, number and assignment number in the header” (see Figure 5). These words therefore appear at the top of every page of the six-page assignment. Russell has already repeatedly mentioned this in feedback on four previous assignments, spoken about it to the student several times, and given a step-by-step phone tutorial on how to do this in Word; he goes on repeating the advice “so that one day she'll see it”. Despite his efforts, Russell doubts that he has communicated successfully with the student; a field note records that he says to me in passing he is “really not sure she will have read the comments”. He also wants to be seen to include this information because of a recent “directive” from the central academic team reminding tutors that students must be told of this requirement to minimise any grounds for appeal when they submit their end-of-course examined project. Along with the “chatty stuff” and a paragraph of feedback, he has included a short response to each learning outcome. Although he finds this approach “very, very formulaic” and “very boring”, he follows this “house style” for two reasons. Firstly, he believes this is what students want as the “consumer coming to the marketplace”. Secondly, he has made a decision to go along with it because his work is being moderated.

You still need to put your name, PI number and TMA in the header.

off and should be the happier society, but, obviously there will be other factors that have not been covered that could influence life expectancy and infant mortality rates.

The tiny town of Bhutan has 'happiness' as a central object (rather as developed economies typically have 'economic growth'), and it aims to maximise not GDP/GNI but what it refers to as GNH or 'gross national happiness', exploring social lives (2009 :41). Bhutan has strict rules which include being on political involvement, religious views and have banned many things UK citizens take for granted like T.V. channels and advertisements.

Looking at countries like Bhutan, it would seem to be absent of many freedoms people in the main seven developed countries have and the one major question would be, can people be happy without their freedom of speech, to decide which religion they choose to follow, to have a say in political decision? It would seem people in Bhutan have lost their freedom to live their life how they want to.

**Comment [K15]:** Can you give evidence to suggest what these are.

**Comment [K16]:** Bhutan is actually a nation state with 700,000 people.

**Deleted:** A

**Comment [K17]:** That's right....why did you call it a town.

**Comment [K18]:** Are you talking specifically about the G7 countries.

**Comment [K19]:** Not sure why this one?

**Figure 5: Russell: extract from a marked assignment  
See Appendix L(6)**

## 5.4 Risk

### 5.4.1 Challenge versus playing safe

Some of the interview extracts discussed in section 5.3 above suggested a possible tension for participants between fairness in assessment, to be achieved through maximising transparency and objectivity, and writing as a necessarily uncertain enterprise involving risk. Angela's use of the word "endeavour" above (see 5.3.3) neatly captures the sense of potential risk students may feel when tackling a writing assignment, but also the possibilities for exploration and even discovery when a student is left to do it 'her way' (to echo Martin's words). Mike also draws on a distinction between challenge and safety, when he contrasts the two different sorts of writing task set for third years on his specialist module (see also 5.3.3 above):

*[In the guided learning log] I was trying to give students a chance to shine individually by challenging them to do a different kind of thing they'd not done anywhere else, whereas the essay's very safe ... basically they're very well trained at doing that kind of thing.*

Mike's reference to students being "very well trained" resonates with his frequent allusions to academic writing as a "hoop jumping" exercise. To what extent is taking a risk a necessary part of meaningful engagement with writing for students and teachers, and how far does 'playing safe' reduce academic writing to a form of "shoehorning" (James)? Where is the best place to draw the line between challenge and support, creativity and predictability? What constitutes productive

and unproductive risk in the context of assessed writing? In this section I build a picture of the way in which such questions were worked through in different ways by individual academic teachers as they negotiated practices in specific contexts. Data analysis also threw light on the question of the extent to which risks for teachers might parallel the (more well-documented) risks around writing for students.

#### *5.4.2 Student writing and risk-taking in different contexts.*

In section 5.3.2 I showed how at OBU, when Angela's students grapple with ideas in their reading and writing, they can take risks partly because the stakes are not high for any individual piece of work. By contrast, for Martin at RGU, the context of high-stakes formal assessment is likely to make it harder for students to share his more risk-friendly personal Oxbridge undergraduate experience. The same applies to other participants' settings. For example, during a discussion with James (NU1) on the question of the use of the first person in academic writing, he explains that when final year students are preparing their dissertations:

*Students are coming to me now saying ... 'can I use first person?' I say it depends...what's most appropriate for what you're doing ...prior to that we're getting them really to conform ... you ... want to make a student safe, you know it's like guiding them, it's like tethers and safety lines because (.) if at an early stage they decide to go off piste and start writing in the first person essays you get the most humungous crap [laughs].*

In this case, James would appear to be open to some risk-taking by students – writing in a less conventional style if it makes sense epistemologically - when they get to the stage of writing their own final dissertation. Before that, the emphasis is on conformity and risk-avoidance: his role as academic teacher is to prevent students going disastrously “off piste”.

Diane (NU2) provides another interesting comparison with Angela. Diane appears to be highly aware of risk for herself as well as for students where written assessment is concerned. Unlike most participants in the study, she expresses a preference for marking the *least* creative type of assignments, where “everybody’s supposed to say more or less the same thing” (see 4.4.4). Nevertheless, she tells me she has decided to depart from routine with a new “creative” discursive assignment for Sports Science students which “gets them to think” (see 4.4.3). Creativity in students’ writing is paralleled with creativity and risk in pedagogic practice for Diane; both teacher and learner are able to “go off in a different direction”. Uncertainty is not something she finds easy to embrace, nevertheless she is working towards this in some ways.

There is another element of risk around student writing in Diane’s case which has a completely different tenor: it is focused on the perils of plagiarism, and other assessment offences, rather than on intellectual or pedagogic challenge and endeavour. Paul, in the same institution, is also worried about risks to students in falling foul of plagiarism rules, and explains the focus on referencing in a second year assignment as an attempt to protect them from this potentially acute danger:

*The thing that I feel quite strongly about ... is that (.) perhaps above anything, ... bad referencing will get them in trouble ... later on, so these sorts of mistakes are ... plagiarism and [a mark of] zero ... at level three.*

In Angela's context, students may be asked to take risks in their writing but the consequences are limited either way. Correspondingly, Angela herself is free to experiment with difficult readings or puzzling essay questions. Tom's version of the Oxbridge context may offer similar flexibility, although the stakes for writing are high for career reasons due to his power as College Law Fellow to give students a crucial professional reference. In interviews and in feedback comments made by both OBU participants, academic referencing and citation conventions rarely come up. Plagiarism is only mentioned by each of them once, in both cases to assure me that they did *not* think it was an issue in a specific student text. In the less elite university settings of other participants, their sense of risk is attuned to the substantial material consequences of formal assessment and in particular to the heightened dangers of serious failure on the grounds of "assessment offences" (Diane). Risk of this type is about the danger of falling foul of the rules, and the teacher's job is to both protect students by teaching the rules, and also to police them.



#### 5.4.3 Perceptions of playing safe as driven by students.

Participants often viewed risk avoidance in academic writing as being driven by students' preference for playing safe and for predictable processes and outcomes around writing (see, for example, Dan's comment in 5.3.1 above). Dan feels that his approach to setting assignments represents more exploratory, open-ended learning, and more closely resembles doing "real" Geography:

*I'll say right, here's some kit, go out and design and experiment, anything you like ... come back next week with the data and let's see how well we've done ... it's real time measurement, flexible, who knows what's going to emerge ... whereas another member of staff might have a pre-prepared data set ... and they've run the same exercise with the same data for fifteen years ... it works, it's efficient, the timings all work, the students love it ... but it doesn't teach students how to be flexible and do research design.*

Here Dan draws on a perceived contrast between his own open-ended, "flexible" practice and that of colleagues, which is more predictable and therefore, he feels, more popular with students. There also seems to be an informal trade-off within the department, where Dan takes on the role of getting students to engage and take risks, while others provide the safer boundaries students prefer: he tells me "some of us have got to do the flexible stuff". He tells me that because students dislike his less predictable approach, he has to "take the hit all the time" in module evaluations: encouraging students to take risks in their written assessments also involves risks for him. Dan describes his dilemma as "it depends on whether you want good evaluations or good students, I suppose". Here there is a strong

suggestion that in responding to students' demands for minimal risk in writing, something is lost in terms of learning; this in turn suggests that the pedagogic relationship, in a contemporary context where students' evaluations are taken increasingly seriously, encompasses tensions which may have negative as well as positive consequences for practices around writing and written assessment. The question of accountability to students is explored in greater detail in section 5.5.

Robert (P92U) is another participant who associates a desire for certainty and safety with students' culture and expectations, which he believes they bring to university from a UK school system dominated by testing and assessment.

*What they seem to want is a not an easy but a definable set of outcomes for everything and ... I just think we should do more than that.*

He sees his institution as being driven by these demands, seeing himself as prepared to take some less popular risks. For example, he has introduced a section of the *Study Skills for Geographers* module called "drawing for Geographers" – about making visual representations of landscape as a means of understanding it. This is a challenge to students who ask:

*'Why are you asking us to do drawing, why can't you just tell us what's out there?'  
... it's a wonderful example of them wanting me to give them an answer.*

Robert sees this innovation as about helping students to make meaning for themselves rather than being told what they should know or see in the landscape. Yet, when he talks specifically about the writing element of the module, this meaning-focused approach seems to fade into the background and the focus instead seems revert to staying safe and not falling foul of the rules, particularly on referencing, covered over three sessions (see 6.2.3).

#### *5.4.4 Academic writing and risk avoidance – not just the students?*

The examples discussed above show that what academic teachers see as risky for students around academic writing is to some extent bound up with risks for themselves as teachers, for example, the risk of being unpopular with students. Another element of risk which can be introduced is that of group text production – where students are jointly responsible with others for the production of a single piece of assessed writing. Emma (RGU) comments on cultural differences she has noticed in this regard, as she has been educated in another European country where:

*the value that you get out of a group experience is seen as so much more important than this individual fairness that I'm much more willing to take the risk ... my colleagues here are very kind of 'oh, a group, can we do that? Is it fair enough?'*

As with other sources of risk – such as departing from well-trodden academic genres - teachers' caution about introducing group processes into students' assessed text production is focused on a concern about the need to be visibly fair in assessment.

James (NU1) compares students' preference for staying within the safe boundaries of the usual style with a conservatism in the writing practices of the discipline itself:

*Most articles you pick up and read are, for career reasons I think [laughs] solidly in the third person and quasi-objective ... this is the acceptable face of Geography and people tend to lose their voice in that ... I think many articles these days could be written by anyone.*

In James' view, published academics themselves may shy away from a writing style which departs from the norm, and those who do "branch out" are usually very senior in their field, and very confident writers: "It's a power relation thing, it demonstrates power as well as uses power." Given this background of conformist disciplinary practice, he explains that "it takes a lot of confidence for a third year student to raise their head above the parapet". This metaphor reinforces the sense of student writing as a locus of high risk, and high stakes. After all, students have their "career reasons" too (often labelled as 'instrumental' or 'surface' approaches). James seems to suggest that only the already established and successful writer – student or academic – can afford to take risks with their writing.

#### 5.4.5 Managing/enabling risk through dialogue

One of the features of Angela's Oxbridge context is that students are enabled to take intellectual risks in their writing by being given opportunities to engage in extended discussion about their work (see 5.3.2 above). In fact, Angela sees the writing as preparation for the face-to-face session:

*I think that they can have a reflective dialogue in the tutorial because they've written the essay.*

Writing is thus part of a larger dialogue between tutor and students, and is seen as an interim stage in learning rather than a finished product.

Despite the contextual differences in terms of assessment, some of the non-Oxbridge participants in the study also seemed to manage risk around student writing partly by finding opportunities for dialogue. For example, Paul (NU2) works with students on a project to produce a written evaluation report on an aspect of an external organisation's sports provision. Paul is conscious that the risks are higher (for the University) than for other assignments, so he builds in the opportunity for regular discussion of the project. Students' work on drafting the report automatically becomes a major part of these meetings, since a satisfactory textual outcome is crucial in maintaining a positive relationship with the external body. For different reasons from Angela's, in this part of Paul's work student writing forms part of a process and series of discussions. This seems to be an attempt by Paul to create a safer 'niche' context where risks are managed through

contact, and an iterative conversation. In Angela's case, low student-staff ratios and lack of formal coursework assessment create a niche; in Paul's case the niche context arises partly because the high stakes for students' written assessments are shared by staff, including Paul himself, and have implications for the external reputation of the institution.

### **Window No. 3: Paul's feedback sheet**

Paul is a Senior Lecturer in Sport Development at NU2, having embarked on academic work mid-career. This is his second year in an academic post. We discuss a feedback form he has completed for a level two essay-style assignment (see Figure 6). Paul has designed the form, basing it on one in use by more experienced colleagues. The assignment itself is new: Paul has taken almost no time in changing the assessment of this module in response to “disappointing” academic writing produced by last year’s cohort. He now sets this written task a few weeks into the module, to give students an opportunity to receive feedback and put advice into practice before the module ends. This feedback sheet is designed “to ensure writing skills are quite clearly part of the assessment and feedback process”. This explicit attention to writing skills in his disciplinary teaching is a practical expression of Paul’s commitment to giving all students a chance, including the chance to have high aspirations.

Paul is not completely confident of his own knowledge of English when giving feedback to students on their writing – he worries that his grammar and punctuation may not be correct – but he feels it is important to try. Four out of eight paragraphs are about referencing, partly because Paul feels it is one of the “fundamentals of academic study”, but also because he wants to protect students from the potentially serious consequences of a verdict of plagiarism. He believes referencing conventions are a bit like “a foreign language”. Paul’s tone with regard to the student’s referencing errors and omissions is much milder than the warnings given in the module handbook, which declares:

Errors of attribution and assessment offences include plagiarism, syndication, collusion, representation, fabrication, impersonation, procedural dishonesty, and cheating in closed assessment. Penalties are severe.

Paul has not interpreted his own module guide as requiring him to report this student’s “errors of attribution” formally, or to apply “severe” penalties. An anonymous assessment system operates across Paul’s institution: after marking the assignment, all is revealed when he tears off a thin strip hiding the student’s name on a “handing-in sheet”. The following week, Paul goes through his feedback with the student point by point, one-to-one, a process which he believes they greatly appreciate. He believes this type of interaction is only possible where the cohort is small, as in this case. Later, when Paul has the opportunity to re-write the module formally, he plans to further adapt the assessment, replacing the current short assignments with longer ones and eliminating a presentation to emphasise writing. Until then, his hands are tied as to the overall number of words he can ask students to write.

<p><b>Structure of the essay:</b></p> <p>You headings indicate that you have identified a number of key documents to include in the piece which is good. However, using the heading as you have does help in providing a clear structure but you really need to develop an essay approach to this piece, as you have presented it, it is more of a report format. You should try to write this sort of piece as a number of paragraphs without the headings, where you link each point section with narrative. You should still try to make sure it is clear, but without the headings.</p> <p>Also – there is a logical structure to talking about these documents based on when they were produced. Try to do more background reading so that you are clearer about these documents and can describe their contents, aims and findings clearly</p> <p><b>Formative Assessment</b> (i.e. areas for improvement)</p> <p>Be careful about the way you describe documents and initiatives. For instance A Sporting Future for All isn't an organisation; it's a govt policy document.</p> <p>Be careful with referencing. In text you don't include the title of the document. For a reference you should include the Author (govt dept who published the doc where there isn't an author stated), and the date. For quotes its author, date and page number.</p> <p>You are crucially missing references in a number of places in your piece. Remember, where you are talking about / describing a piece of work, document, book etc you need to reference this. This is crucial in academic writing so that you don't give the impression you are taking somebody else's work as your own.</p> <p>Reference list – on a separate sheet at the back please, and remember the order for information on your reference list</p> <p>Author: Date: Title (Italics): Publisher: Location of Publisher.</p> <p>I do think you probably should have read around the piece more. Try to make sure you are doing the weekly readings and associated readings. I do think that clarity in your piece would have been much better with more reading.</p>	
<p><b>Signed</b>..... <b>Date</b>.....</p> <p><b>2<sup>nd</sup> Marked by</b>.....</p>	<p><b>Agreed Mark:</b></p>

**Figure 6: Paul: extract from feedback sheet**

**See Appendix L(7)**



## **5.5 Accountability**

### *5.5.1 Accountability to students as customers*

The themes of fairness and risk are closely linked for participants with another dominant discourse of contemporary academic life: accountability (see 2.7.1), that is being seen to be fair and to meet student needs in a context where writing is closely bound up with success or failure. The nature of accountability is dependent on the social relationships between those who hold and are held to account. One discourse of accountability which study participants drew on frequently, though to varying degrees, positioned students as (paying) customers (see 2.5.2). Participants oriented in varying ways towards this marketised form of accountability. Here I explore these contested understandings of accountability as they emerged in participants' practices around student writing, and their implications for social relations in the academy. I go on to explore student-oriented accountability beyond the university and its significant role in many participants' experience of practice around student writing.

### *5.5.2 Keeping the customers happy*

Several participants explicitly linked accountability for their practices around student writing with notions of students as the paying customers of HE. For example, although Russell (DLU) would like to give feedback "in [his] own style", he readily acknowledges that his mature part time students are very focused on the assessment criteria, so he always includes a systematic breakdown of feedback against these when responding to written work "because they are the clients" (see Window 2: 195). Student evaluations play an important part in Dan's

(RGU) context, especially now that performance in the National Student Survey has become one way in which his institution can seek to “maintain a competitive edge”. Dan brings a student evaluation summary to discuss at our second interview. He tells me, with only a hint of irony: “we’re always trying to keep our customers happy.”

There was some evidence that participants’ practices around students’ assessed texts were shaped by anticipation of the need to be accountable, face to face, to students. For example, in section 4.4.4 we saw how Diane writes feedback bearing in mind the need to match it up with the score if a student enquires. This suggests feedback practices designed around defence; if a student comes to challenge a grade, justification will be there in black and white, thus prioritising the accountability function of feedback rather than that of a learning dialogue. The audience for feedback comments is still the student, but as unhappy customer, not as learner. Mike’s (NU1) description of the purpose of written feedback on students’ scripts also has a slightly defensive ring to it:

*I do approach all my marking with a sense that a student will not legitimately be able to say I’ve done my job properly if I don’t tell them why they didn’t get a hundred per cent*

Dan’s explanation of the purpose of feedback includes an even more explicit articulation of its defensive function: he believes including detailed feedback prevents challenges from students:

*You're actually protecting yourself ... I can't defend a mark of sixty-eight without a solid enough [feedback] matrix, because if the student challenges it ... you say 'there you go' ... if it's a one liner they always come back to you and say 'what do you mean by this ... why did you give me that mark?'*

This again raises the suggestion that safety is a consideration for academic teachers in their practice around student writing, and that it is students they may need to be protected from. This idea resurfaces, in the context of students' perceived needs around writing, rather than their potential challenges to grades, in Chapter 6.

### *5.5.3 Face-to-face accountability: post-assessment conversations about student writing*

In the above examples, participants tended to explain their written feedback – its amount, style, structure etc. - in terms of how they geared it to a possible post-assessment conversation with an individual student. The typical conversation which many seemed to anticipate was overwhelmingly of the nature of a 'holding to account' over issues of fairness – with possible regulatory or legal overtones – rather than an opportunity to discuss feedback and how to take it forward. Sue (DLU) comments that if students contact her after a marked assignment has been returned:

*Usually it's about the score or a comment I might have made 'I don't think that's fair'.*

Sometimes participants described or imagined these meetings as difficult encounters for staff and students. Martin (RGU), for example, admits that he had not fully taken on board the degree to which students can be “genuinely troubled” by their grades for written work when he began teaching this course. He attributes their anguish to a misunderstanding of the nature of his accountability as their teacher:

*I've had anguished feedback with a student who felt that their work was worth more than we'd assigned it ... it was put to me really that it was our fault that she hadn't got the 2:1, because clearly it was our job to teach her and therefore any disappointment in the grading was down to us, which was an interesting perspective.*

The challenge of being accountable to students in a context where their expectations may be misguided, or at least different from that of teachers, is revisited in section 6.4.2 where I look further at participants' attempts to manage students' expectations of academic teachers' practice around their writing.

#### *5.5.4 Accountability to the institution for students' satisfaction*

Russell (DLU) explained in an interview that

*I do know that the vast majority of students really want to know how they can get it right next time ... that reinforces what I write because it's to them you're delivering.*

This suggests, as with Dan, Diane, Deborah and Mike above, that a formative and teaching purpose for feedback is framed as a need to “deliver” to students. However, Russell goes on to explain that “‘cause you know your work’s being monitored, you specify ... the criteria”. So the form his written feedback takes (see also Window 2: 195) is shaped by Russell’s accountability to the institution as well as to the student:

*You’ve not only got a face to the student, the customer, you’ve also got a face to whoever happens to be monitoring ... this isn’t just a communication to the student.*

In this example, accountability to individual students and to the institution’s quality assurance processes merge; the institution is a third party in the feedback exchange, due to moderation or because any appeal will go beyond the individual academic teacher in question. At P92U, where Pam works part time (as well as at DLU), she believes that the drive to be accountable to students has resulted in an institutional practice of *not* permitting a “running commentary” of feedback in the margins of a student’s script. This she tells me is now institutional policy; feedback has to be written on the official top sheet, to prevent students suing over the quality of advice.<sup>22</sup> This heightens accountability around student writing to a quasi-

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<sup>22</sup> This practice appears to be ongoing at P92U in 2012, at least in some Faculties, although not stated in publicly available regulations, and a subject of active debate [personal communication, Ms J. Liddle].

legalistic level. Thus the student is not alone in holding teachers to account: academic teachers' practices address institutional imperatives, which in turn seek to respond to students as customers and to protect the institution in a legal sense, even where the resulting practices may prove less helpful for particular students and their learning.

Interestingly, however, in the Oxbridge-located cases there was much less sense of third party monitoring or quality surveillance. Angela devised and used her own evaluation form for use with students, which was neither read nor required by anyone else; she was struck by the lack of individual teacher accountability for grades at OBU, having experienced a system in the US where she felt teachers were routinely "bullied" by students into raising a grade. Tom's students filled in a "Survey Monkey" evaluation form after each term, but it never went any further than him and the relevant director of studies, and there was no monitoring of grading or feedback. This does not mean that there was no accountability in those settings, but that it took a less bureaucratised form; for example, Tom's means of dealing with the presumed underperformance of an "outside tutor" was to "subtly" stop hiring them in future.

#### *5.5.5 Accountability beyond the University: the National Student Survey*

In Dan's context, the National Student Survey (NSS) has assumed some importance in shaping priorities in practice around students' assessed writing at

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RGU (see Window 4: 217). When we are setting up a second interview, Dan writes in an e-mail to me:

You'll be interested to know that feedback is this year's mantra again as we unpick the reasons for a worsening score on the National Student Survey for assessment and feedback.

In the study it emerged that other participants were similarly aware of the NSS and were trying to actively respond to its outcomes: they brought it up repeatedly in interviews. For example, Paul (NU2) regards it as a "very powerful" part of evaluation and improvement within higher education. Mike (NU1) is also highly aware of the NSS as an important tool for him in building the institution's reputation and recruiting students to courses in the department he heads:

*The National Student Survey is very good for an institution of this type because it's small it's not prestigious in a way like a place like [RGU] might be, and so what we value is the opportunity for students experiencing our courses for their voice to contribute to our reputation for teaching quality.*

The NSS seemed to have played a part particularly in pushing the issue of feedback up the agenda in many participants' contexts, and was often raised by participants in interviews wherever feedback on students' written work was being discussed. On the other hand, Tom and Angela at OBU, and Martin, a paediatrician at RGU, had never heard of the Survey. In the case of Oxbridge

participants, this reinforces the finding that accountability around student writing in their contexts was not generally mediated by institutional or suprainstitutional processes but was handled on a smaller scale, for example through evaluation processes which remain at tutor or College level (see 5.5.4). Martin's teaching role at RGU Medical degree occupies only a small part of his working week as a clinician, so this may partly explain why he does not know about the Survey. In any case Martin (like Robert at P92U), is very suspicious about giving students "what they want". But in a context where institutions compete to recruit fee-paying students, practices around student writing, such as feedback, become part of the 'package' that students have been promised. For example, Mike tells me that as a departmental head he is able to use feedback given to students as a "marketing tool", when attracting new students to the Geography degree. It then becomes part of an implicit customer contract - which might in practice be difficult to deliver. As Emma (RGU) comments:

*I think there's always the sort of the public face of the university and of the department, when they will always give you a nice booklet which talks about all kinds of skills the students will develop but then the actual tradition or custom might be completely different from the public face.*

Just as in Pam's example in section 5.5.4 above, it would seem that institutional drives for greater accountability, framed in terms of a marketised system, do not necessarily result in practices around their writing which benefit students.



#### **Window No. 4: Dan's moderation checklist**

Dan is a well-established Senior Lecturer in Geography at RGU. We discuss a package of paperwork for the moderator which he has assembled for a second level Research Methods assignment "of a technical nature". The package is topped by an official cover sheet, entitled "Moderation check list for coursework components" (see Figure 7), which has been filled in by a senior colleague of Dan's; the requisite documents are assembled beneath it. The checklist and the package which backs it up is now a requirement for moderation purposes since staff in the School of Geography have "tightened up [their] protocols over the past few years." The check list consists mainly of a list of statements with space for yes/no answers and moderator's comments, for example: "I confirm that I have reviewed the documents detailing the set assignment" and "Marking has been completed, and work will be returned, according to the dates set in the School's Assessment timetable". The moderator comments that Dan's marking has been completed one week early.

Dan has mixed feelings about the change in practice represented by this checklist text. On one hand, he feels that it is "rather draconian"; on the other, he thinks that it has "upped the ante" and likes to think that some of his own good practice has influenced the change in departmental expectations. For example, it was originally his habit to pull together a general written summary for the whole group of students; this individual practice has fed directly into one of the benchmark statements on the moderation check list: "The marker has written a document summarising overall performance on the exercise." Dan's group feedback sheet is included in the package, as required.

Dan also feels that his own feedback practice on individual assignments, informed by what he has learned on courses within the university, now represents a "base line" in the School of Geography. He feels that higher expectations of academic colleagues have been actively spread through the use of the check list: because it presents expectations explicitly "you wouldn't be handing in a thing [marked assignment for moderation] that had an inappropriate amount of [feedback] text on it." One of the checklist statements reads: "The marker has provided adequate feedback to the students by way of comments on the submitted work"; the moderator comments that Dan has been "more detailed than most". Dan is also aware of this variation in colleagues' individual feedback practices, and believes the extra layer of bureaucracy has become necessary in recent years because a number of colleagues (especially "the old birds") had not been giving adequate and/or timely feedback. This issue has particular salience for Dan because he and colleagues at University and School level are conscious of a deteriorating performance in the National Student Survey.

**School of Geographical Sciences**

**Moderation check list for course work components<sup>1</sup>**

Unit Code and Name: [REDACTED] – Research Methods In Physical Geography

Assignment: **Basic Survey** [REDACTED] Building (Group)

Responsible Staff Member: [REDACTED]

Markers: [REDACTED]

Hand in Date: **Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2007 (Week 3)**

Date for Return of Material to Students: **Friday 30<sup>th</sup> November 2007 (Week 8)**

Unit Moderator: [REDACTED]

Moderation Package includes:

Written assignment	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	Ordered student work	Yes/No N/A	Feedback document	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	Mark spreadsheet <sup>2</sup>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
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**Check list**

		Comments and/or cases where moderator has adjusted marks (please give candidate numbers and explanation) <sup>5</sup>
I confirm that I have reviewed the documents detailing the set assignment <sup>2</sup>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	
I confirm the marks awarded to any failed work <sup>3</sup>	Yes/No	N/A
I confirm the marks awarded to any borderline work <sup>3</sup>	Yes/No	N/A
I have reviewed a sample of mid-class work <sup>3</sup>	Yes/ <del>No</del>	
In the event that the course work was group based, the balance between the group and individual elements of the mark are consistent with information given to the students	Yes/No	N/A

**Figure 7: Dan: extract from moderation check list**

**See Appendix L(8)**

## **5.6 Concluding comments**

In this chapter I have shown how contemporary assessment regimes impinge on the practices of academic teachers, particularly through the privileging of discourses of fairness, risk and accountability around assessed writing. While institutionally shaped practices designed to promote fair treatment for students in assessed writing may be well intentioned, analysis of participants' practices from a teacher perspective suggests that attempts to be both transparent and objective in assessing writing often do not succeed, while at the same time they may be counterproductive because they reduce the possibilities for constructive formative interaction between teachers and students around writing. Teacher comments on writing may be addressed at times more to a third party institutional quality assurance audience than to students themselves. I have also shown how the 'high stakes' of assessed writing in most participants' contexts also promote concerns over academic writing as a potentially risky activity, which teachers feel they should make safe for their students, with potentially negative consequences for students' and teachers' learning and engagement. The analysis also shows how teachers' practices in connection with student writing in their disciplines have been shaped by understandings of accountability, framed at institutional level but filtering down to shape the relationship between teachers and students in terms of customer and provider. This has the potential to result in dissatisfaction and disappointment for students and a sense of defensiveness amongst staff, played out in exchanges around assessed academic writing. This suggests a potential fragility of trust in pedagogic relationships where student writing is concerned, perhaps with profound consequences for the ways in which academic teachers perceive their responsibilities in relation to student writing in the disciplines.

One further interpretation of these findings is that the focus on writing-as-assessment observable in the non-Oxbridge contexts of study participants may privilege certain understandings of the nature and purpose of academic writing itself. Widespread institutional assumptions of the possibility and desirability of transparency, for example in the form of published assessment criteria for student writing, raise troubling issues for academic teachers charged with translating such assumptions into practice, about the relationship between writing and learning. The messy realities of practice around student writing often entail treading a fine line between a generative puzzlement and open-endedness on one hand, and obfuscation and exclusion on the other. There was some evidence that long-established notions of academic writing as neutral and impersonal were reinforced by relatively recent institutional demands for demonstrable objectivity in assessment. Again, the analysis here indicates that participants' own practices took shape amidst varying degrees of tension with such institutional imperatives, for example through their selection of particular assessment genres or processes. The four "Windows" onto practice in this chapter illustrate the everyday reality for academic teachers as they try to tread these lines.

In some participants' institutional contexts, 'objectivity' in assessing writing was promoted through the adoption of anonymised assessment procedures. Traditional academic texts are more amenable to anonymity, through the ability to separate the product physically from the producer, than an oral presentation or video diary; it is also easier to separate the 'personal' from certain sorts of writing, such as an essay or lab report (as opposed to a field note book or learning log) because of notions of academic knowledge as objective, requiring the effacement of the autobiographical self from the text. In section 7.2 I return to consider how

dominant assumptions of objectivity and transparency in the discourse of university assessment may feed an underlying, unproductive, discourse of academic writing itself as transparent and neutral.

Data analysis in the chapter has also thrown light on the atypical cases of Tom and Angela based in an Oxbridge institution, where many aspects of the relationship between writing and assessment apparent in other types of university appear to be turned on their heads: student writing and formal assessment procedures are far less intertwined in the everyday practice of these academic teachers, pushing issues of fairness into the background, radically altering the nature of the risks students and teachers are asked to take, and entailing much less emphasis on a marketised version of pedagogic accountability where practice around writing is concerned. These findings suggest that institutional context, for example as embodied in particular contrasting assessment regimes, has a powerful influence on the practices of individual academic teachers. In the chapter which follows, institutional context continues to figure in my analysis. However, the focus shifts away from ways in which participants' tread an individual pathway through institutional assessment policies and procedures, towards even less well charted paths taken by individual academic teachers as they get work around student writing done (or pass it to someone else to do) while frequently operating 'off the record' in official terms.

## **Chapter 6: Carving out spaces for work around student writing: resources, identities and the desire for collaboration**

### **6.1 Introduction**

#### *6.1.1 Assessed writing from the perspective of teachers' lived experience*

As shown in Chapter 5, with the significant exceptions of Tom and Angela in Oxbridge settings, data generated in this study throw light largely on the practices of academic teachers connected with the formal assessment trajectory, from setting assignments as part of curriculum development, to the point when an external examiner confirms grades for students' written work. Participants had varying amounts of work to do at different points on this trajectory, depending on their role and institutional context. One significant element for all fourteen participants was the activity of engaging individually with student writing for assessment: reading, judging, making marks on scripts, awarding grades, giving feedback. The visibility of these activities here needs to be understood in light of methodological caveats (see 3.5.3), but also in terms of methodological affordances, because the approach adopted lends itself to the uncovering of academic teachers' usually 'hidden' practices. Marking and feedback-giving are often invisible to colleagues (e.g. done alone, perhaps not even on work premises), so participants may have wanted to talk about these activities precisely because there were few other opportunities to make this work visible in their institutional contexts.

The ‘emic’ perspectives of academic teachers in this study often brought to the fore a sense of practices around student writing as “labour-intensive” (Tom, OBU), entailing time, effort, “psychological energy” (Diane, NU2), finance, and other forms of resource. Decisions about practice were not merely isolated pedagogical choices, but made in the context of participants’ universities as workplaces: the demands placed on them as employees, the time, money and recognition allocated (or not) to particular activities. A good example of how this perspective emerged is provided by the term ‘marking’, used extensively by academic teachers in the study alongside terms such as ‘feedback’ and ‘assessment’. Participants used it to refer to the practice of annotating (making marks on) students’ scripts, awarding a grade (mark) and summarising feedback for the student; it also refers – in this study and generally in the vocabulary of teachers – to this process as a task, and to the physical scripts which are central to the task (for example, “a pile of marking” (Diane)<sup>23</sup>). Importantly, this combination of shades of meaning for the word “marking” signals that the feedback relationship is not, from a teacher perspective, usually a ‘teacher/ learner’ dyad, but one in which the teacher responds to several – or many – students’ texts, a perspective rare in published empirical research to date. Its emergence in the words and worlds of participants in this study highlights teachers’ experience of assessment-related practices around student writing as work.

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<sup>23</sup> In interviews across the study, the word “marking” frequently collocated with the word “pile”, and sometimes with the word “batch”.

There is another sense of the term “marking” which makes it particularly pertinent to the analysis in this chapter: as well as its use by teachers to denote a particular form of work, the term bears traces of its origins in the concept of “making one’s mark”. Some participants’ marking practice bore striking resemblance to craft work in the sense that they were producing ‘bespoke’ feedback products, tailor-made to the needs of the individual student. A craftsman<sup>24</sup> who had reason to take pride in his work would imprint an identifying (hall)mark on the products of his craft, a mark which was simultaneously an indication of the originator’s identity and a declaration of quality, which sometimes translated into cash value. Participants in this study were, similarly, marking to establish quality, to be translated into grades and a degree for students as well as other sorts of value for the teacher and the institution. At the same time they were “making their mark” in a different way – engaged in an act of identity, creating and maintaining social relationships and making sense of their own role as disciplinary academic teachers.

***Personal reflection No. 4: ‘Tailor-made’***

*This way of framing marking practices, as the production of ‘tailor-made’ feedback, I realise, has emerged from the data in part because of my own history as the grand-daughter of a tailor. My grandfather used to produce fine ‘bespoke’ suits for gentlemen, working from home in the evenings after working for a retailer in the city and then in retirement until he was 85. My childhood memories are that he was always sewing in the corner of the living room, though he also had a wooden table for pressing and cutting in the bedroom. I also remember it was a topic of*

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<sup>24</sup> I have chosen to use masculine forms here because traditionally the “mark” was applied to products of craft work generally only open to men.



*family conversations that Granddad did not charge his well-to-do customers enough for their suits. I think these memories have influenced my slight scepticism of the idea that writing work as craft is straightforwardly a good thing: the insider's perspective gives a more mixed, less romantic picture, which understands the costs in terms of time, effort and attention to detail, as well as the quality of the final product.*

### 6.1.2 Outline of the chapter

As in Chapter 5, here I adopt a weft-like approach to data analysis, taking up emerging patterns and exploring connections across the study. Section 6.2 takes up general themes of marginality and mixed feelings which emerged in Chapter 4, and articulates them more specifically in terms of how such work is actively resourced by academic teacher participants from a range of sources (institutional, collegial, professional and personal). The following two sections focus on how participants saw themselves and were seen by others in relation to their practice around student writing. In section 6.3 I focus particularly on how work around writing was bound up with competing available identities which surfaced in the words of participants: teacher, researcher, academic. In section 6.4, I explore the ways in which autonomy, as a key aspect of academic teachers' identity, was played out in decisions about practice and in collegial and pedagogic relationships around student writing. Section 6.5 turns attention more generally to what can be learned from the study about the dynamic relationship between individual academic teachers and their institutional contexts. The chapter is based on analysis of interview transcript data, drawn from all fourteen study participants, and on researchers' field notes, audio recordings, recorded observations and occasionally participants' written feedback comments.

## 6.2 Resourcing work around writing

### 6.2.1 Finding time for writing work

In an interview, Deborah (P92U) described how she used to run workshop-style, ninety-minute classes in a first year module in History, to help students develop their academic writing in the discipline. She felt the session was valuable because it allowed time for working in small groups and thus to generate all-important “stupid questions” which would get asked because individuals did not feel exposed:

*so people who are afraid of looking stupid can say **we’ve** got a question rather than **I’ve** got a question [Deborah’s emphasis].*

However, she explains that for financial reasons the session time had to be reduced, and then:

*We tried to do it for one hour but then it became very clunky and very difficult because you almost have to tell students rather than let them do it.*

Time within the disciplinary curriculum to allow students to work constructively together on their academic writing appeared to be vulnerable here, despite Deborah’s senior position and her commitment to embedding “skills ... as part of good historical practice.” Deborah’s plan is to go back to longer, seminar-style sessions, even though they are “heavier on resources” (see 6.5).

Finding time was also a major challenge in relation to non-timetabled face-to-face work with students around their writing (see, for example, Tom's account in 4.3.3). For participants across the study, 'drop-in' or 'office hours' contact often seemed to be squeezed in, if time could be found. For example, Deborah asks students to come back at the end of the working day for a mini-tutorial about punctuation. In field notes from a research visit I record that Mike (NU1) has tried to squeeze in some drop-in sessions for students working on a written field work report, and eventually runs out of time for this as weeks go by, so combines it with another session where students are receiving feedback on a previous assignment.

More clearly still, the challenges of finding time emerge strongly in relation to the more solitary aspects of work around student writing, especially marking. Deborah associates painstaking work with students' texts with "arts subjects" (see 4.6.3), including her own discipline of History, as opposed to subjects such as Engineering. However, the experience of the time-consuming nature of engagement with students' written texts was echoed by many, if not all, participants, irrespective of discipline or type of institution. This is summed up by Diane (NU2):

*That's the thing about marking, it takes for ever ... there's so much of it.*

#### *6.2.2 Marginal times, marginal spaces: unrecognised work*

One significant consequence of the time-consuming nature of marking for participants, together with its solitary aspect, seemed to be that it was often

pushed to the margins of the working day and so also to marginal working spaces: participants talked about late-night marking at home (Tom, Dan, Diane, Sue), at the kitchen table (Diane, Pam), in a corner of the family living room (Pam), in bed (Angela), or in hotel rooms (Russell), as well as in the office after the end of 'normal' working hours (Mike, Dan) or very early in the morning (Angela), and referred to snatching time for marking on train journeys (Deborah, Mike) or in cafés (Mike). A field note records that Tom (OBU) commented trenchantly that there was "no chance" he would ever do marking within normal working hours.

Participants in diverse contexts expressed a belief that there was insufficient time allocated for this work<sup>25</sup>. For example, Sue at DLU nearly always exceeded the notional allocation for marking of forty-five minutes per script (see 4.5.3) and reported occasionally taking up to three hours. By contrast, in NU2, a face-to-face institution with larger student/teacher ratios for marking, Paul was allocated twenty minutes to mark a three-thousand-word assignment. Despite these different models of 'delivery' and hugely different timings, both Sue and Paul experienced the time allocation as inadequate for the task in hand. For example, commenting on the twenty minute allocation, Paul said:

*I don't think I could read the three thousand words in twenty minutes to do it credit really, to mark it, to consider it, to comment and give feedback.*

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<sup>25</sup> The exception was James (NU1).

Sue felt the inadequate time allocation in her institution would have negative consequences for students:

*You're not going to pick up on these things and help the student as much as you'd like to; there's not enough hours.*

Thus, while the benchmarks of time allocation for work with students' texts varied hugely from one participant's context to another, the lived experience of insufficient time to 'do credit' to students' work was a common thread running across the study.

Issues of resourcing in terms of time had corresponding implications for the extent to which individuals felt their work with student writing was recognised by others. For some, this view was reflected in references to "unpaid work" (Martin, RGU), or being "voluntary workers" (Sue, DLU); in other cases, participants talked about whether this work was valued in a broader sense. For example, Diane (NU2) comments that:

*[We] are praised for the effort we put in, in turning student work around in a timely manner with the numbers that we've got ... but as an overall department structure and process ... they're not working with us so well in terms of helping us to do this and making it as valued as it could be.*

Deborah (P92U) expressed a similar sense that such activity was not recognised at higher levels in her institution:

*I don't think [senior management] even see it ... they think we ask [students] to write two and a half thousand word essays and ... then give them minimal feedback ... that seems to be what they think we do.*

As course leader, Martin (RGU) experienced difficulties in finding staff to supervise student dissertations, because

*it will not appear anyway in their tally of what they've done that year. It's invisible because grants and publications are all that an academic is assessed on, obviously, but that's the world one lives in, and I'm fortunate that I think a topic like [specialist subject], it has a lot of good will and that's what we harness.*

This extract provides an interesting glimpse into the system of value operating in Martin's institution in which work with student writing does not count in the evaluation of an academic. Given this "obvious" state of affairs, Martin's role as course leader is to resource this work by harnessing colleagues' "good will".

Much of the work which participants talked about for the study was not formally recorded at all and thus was even more 'invisible' to audit and evaluation processes in their institutions. Aspects of the work, such as trawling through internet sites to find a student's source, or talking face-to-face with a colleague

about a borderline assignment, are barely if at all represented in permanent written form. As Deborah (P92U) explains: “it’s not just the words [*of feedback*], it’s all the stuff that’s gone on behind the words” which constitute her practices around student writing, yet much of this is lost to view institutionally.

### *6.2.3 Writing work: weighing up costs and benefits*

This emerging pattern in which writing work is frequently resourced, in terms of time, space and effort, by individuals themselves, while remaining under-resourced at institutional level, moves the focus of analysis towards a consideration of the personal costs and rewards of writing work as understood by participants. As well as some of the dissatisfactions of marginality discussed above, discontentment about the lack of intellectual reward such work entailed surfaced regularly in participants’ accounts: writing work often appeared to be associated with boredom. This sometimes applied to face-to-face work with students: for example, Dan (RGU) commented that he preferred not to tackle academic referencing in face-to-face tutorials because it is extremely “dry” to teach: he directed students to support materials instead. Robert (P92U) described his Study Skills for Geographers module as driven by the following questions:

*Can we enhance their geographical literacy? Can we develop things that will excite them perhaps rather more than learning how to reference their work?*

Robert uses the term “geographical literacy” here to mean “drawing for geographers”, photograph and poster work: he associates topics such as

referencing with my interests as a researcher (“where you’re coming from, Jackie”) and with the “dull” aspects of academic literacy such as referencing (see 5.4.3). This suggests that Robert may in some ways share his students’ sense of the dullness of academic writing.

A similar theme of boredom and dullness also surfaced in the context of assessment of writing. Participants frequently referred to marking and feedback-giving in terms such as “tedious and disheartening”, “a pain” (Angela, OBU), or “soul destroying” (Tom, OBU). James commented that marking exam scripts was “the worst part of the job”. Emma described the marking of a batch of fifty reports as “boring and tedious”; she was very frank about her lack of interest in the topic of this assignment. Deborah described a colleague who uses a countdown on his Facebook page just to cope with the boredom of marking, and jokes that every academic she knows

*feels like slashing their wrists two thirds of the way through a pile of marking.*

Diane (NU2) divided marking into “smaller batches” partly because if she did not “it would bore [her] to tears”.

A sense of weary boredom emerged in other sorts of data, too. For example, Mike (NU1) recorded himself talk while marking two students’ scripts; they had been asked to tackle a “traditional, boring essay”, which involved reading some rather “dull literature” (see 7.3.3). Mike’s tone throughout the fifty-minute recording



seems flat and sarcastic in comparison with his talk generally and in interviews. The most audibly animated moments occur at points in the recording when he finds some of things he is expecting to find in the students' work, in terms of references to the relevant literature. These were not "strong" scripts, and there could be many explanations for Mike's tone here, but the sense of boredom is palpable and seems a long way from the excitement, enthusiasm and energy for teaching Mike expresses elsewhere:

*I feel it's a really important job, teaching students in an exciting, enthusiastic, energizing way, ok it doesn't happen for every student, but for some students it changes their lives ... it happened to me.*

It is no wonder that after collection, "piles" of unmarked scripts sometimes "lurk" in Mike's office, waiting to be tackled. Tom (OBU) comments that when he sits down in the evening (like Diane at NU2, when "family time" is over) he thinks to himself:

*I've got two solid hours ahead of me and I'm not really going to get anything out of it myself ... but you do it, that's the job, pour a glass of red wine and get on with it ... students never appreciate that you've given up your evening.*

This weariness seemed to be intensified for some by doubts that their work would have any palpable benefits for students. Most participants expressed a doubt that many or any of the students would even read their feedback, or respond to the

advice given. A sense of wasted effort provides a downbeat thread of feeling running across participants' accounts. For example, Russell (DLU) felt that he sometimes repeated the same feedback many times before a student was able to hear and respond to it, if they ever did: "you can say it 'til you're black and blue, and they don't do it" (see also Window 2: 195). Mike comments:

*Students pick up this carefully crafted feedback they see sixty-two and then they put it back on the pile and then they go home. They don't read feedback.*

Mike's use of the phrase "carefully crafted feedback" here suggests work which has been done painstakingly and on an individualised basis, along with a lack of reciprocation in students' response, and so of work with few rewards (see Personal Reflection No. 4: 221-2).

Despite these negative associations, participants also occasionally found more positive rewards in work around student writing, particularly at moments where they had stepped outside the usual routines for writing and asked students to do so, for example by choosing to set an experimental written assignment in an unfamiliar genre, as illustrated in the accounts of practice in Chapter 4 (e.g. Emma and Diane). What made the time and effort worthwhile varied for individuals at different times. This could be simply at the level of learning about the topic. For example, in a series of observed small group tutorials, Emma (RGU) told students repeatedly of her enjoyment of their abstracts, and her eager anticipation of the final article; she and her colleague N repeatedly refer to what they call "value-added" when praising students' contribution to the course, to other students and to

*tutors themselves* by researching a subject which was new and less well known. For example, to one group who have tackled a topic of “strong personal interest” for her Emma says she is really pleased with the topic chosen, because it will mean

*good added value for me and the other students in the event that you decide to present to the class*

and to another group whose topic is less familiar to her:

*You are lucky that I don't know much about [specialist topic], lucky you.*

This is in stark contrast to her boredom with a second year assignment where she was “just one of the markers”. As we saw with Dan’s “real time” data gathering in section 5.4.3, the opportunity to link written assignments with learning for the teacher too was greatly valued by many participants.

There were also other, practical/strategic benefits which provided a rationale for participants for spending time and energy in paying attention to student writing – exemplified in Chapter 4 (Emma, Deborah, Tom) and in section 5.4.5 about Paul’s investment of time on one module involving links with external organisations. Seeing student writing improve, particularly where participants felt able to directly relate this to their own efforts as academic teachers, was also an important source of personal satisfaction and reward (see Deborah in 4.6.4). Some even expressed

pleasure. For example, Angela (OBU), although she had found working with one student's writing rather onerous (see Window 1: 181), and was not sure how much her advice had helped him, nevertheless wrote on his final essay for her: "It has been a pleasure to see your essays improve."

The above analysis shows that where academic teachers had a sense that their efforts were likely to be worthwhile – in whatever way they framed this – they were often prepared to draw on their personal resources to "do something about [student writing]" (Tom, OBU) (see 4.3.3). However, these satisfactions were generally mixed with other, less positive feelings. Cumulatively across the fourteen cases, a sense emerged that much of the work involved in enabling students to produce academic writing is a rather dull task to be endured rather than enjoyed, in which the costs far outweigh the benefits for academic teachers, and where actual benefits to students are perceived to be severely limited; this was particularly so for work with students' texts, especially marking and feedback-giving. Deborah (P92U) offers a graphic description of the experience of marking in particular which powerfully captures the despair engendered by a sense of fruitless effort:

*The actual doing it [as opposed to 1-1 meetings with students afterwards] is Chinese water torture, it's horrible, it's awful ... it's Sisyphean, isn't it.*

Deborah's classical reference conjures up the image of the mythical King of Sisyphus, rolling a boulder endlessly up a hill in Hades, only to find it crashing to the bottom at the end of every day, ready to be pushed to the top again the next.

Deborah's use of the phrase "isn't it" at this point in an interview also captures her sense that these difficult feelings are an everyday experience for anyone working in an academic teaching job in the UK – she (rightly) expects me to find them extremely familiar.

***Personal reflection No. 5: 'Torture'***

*Recently I came across the word torture again, used by a colleague, Vikki Atkinson<sup>26</sup>, in a message on the online forum for tutors on the English Language module we both teach. Vikki had previously posted a message to the forum sharing deep concern about a student who did not appear to be responding to or even reading feedback. She was wondering whether to plough on repeating the same comments like a "broken record", or to continue to write all the comments again and again, because her work is being monitored. Having received a supportive message, she replies:*

*... It is particularly horrible reading the same mistakes every assignment and my marking of [the student's] assignments is abject torture since she is clearly not listening to a word I am saying ...*

*This comment struck me because it resonates perfectly with Deborah's melodramatic use of the word "torture", and with my own experience of marking students' essays: it is not the work, not the time, but the sense that no-one is listening which can make this process torturous and 'soul-destroying'. The tutor's voice as assessor is authoritative and her verdict (almost) final – but in this case, she cannot make her voice as a teacher heard, or make her work count.*

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<sup>26</sup> Dr Atkinson gave permission for me to use her words and opted to have her real name used in the thesis.

As we have seen, a sense of the reduced worth of such work to participants was often associated with a sense that it went unnoticed by students and colleagues and/or received little recognition within the institution. In some cases, participants felt there were potential rewards in terms of protecting or enhancing their own reputation beyond the institution (e.g. Tom and Paul). This dimension of the costs and benefits of work around writing related to how individuals saw themselves and were seen by others in their working contexts. This brings us to questions of identity as a potentially valuable source of reward, but also a source of risk, since marginal work around writing might be experienced as marginalising to the individuals engaged in it. The role of identities in academic teachers' work around student writing is the focus of the following section.

### **6.3 *Academic teacher identities***

Here I aim to show how participants negotiated between different “possibilities for selfhood ... available in the academic community” (Ivanič, 1998: 92) through their practices around student writing. In keeping with other work in academic literacies (see 2.2.3), I use the plural form “identities” to signal a postmodern view of identity as multiple, dynamic, shifting, contextual and constructed from moment to moment through discourse and practice (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). In this non-essentialist view, “identities” have been theorised as intrinsically relational (Moje *et al.*, 2009; Hall, 1996). I understand this to mean both that different identities are constructed in relation to one another, which is the focus in section 6.3, and that identities are constructed through relationships with other people, which forms the basis of discussion in section 6.4.

### 6.3.1 Academic teacher identities: teachers and pedagogues

Work around student writing represents an investment in teaching. All of the participants in the study were evidently committed to their work with students, and, in different ways, took seriously the teaching dimension of their role (see 3.5.1). However, there was a huge range in the extent to which they identified explicitly as *teachers*. Some participants were unambiguously positive in their attachment to a teaching identity, particularly where they perceived their institution as “teaching-led”. For example, on his university webpage Robert described “teaching and learning in Higher Education” as amongst his research interests. Deborah explicitly identified herself as a historian interested in *pedagogy*, despite what she feels are institutional perceptions to the contrary:

*It's a constant mystery to me but we hear this repeated back to us over and over again 'the historians aren't interested in new pedagogic ideas'.*

Elsewhere, Deborah commented that she thinks that her department's success in *research* means that the wider university perceives it to be uninterested in *teaching*, a view she strongly rejects.

At NU1, Mike described himself and departmental colleagues on the external-facing departmental website:

We're very keen to not just be professional geographers but professional teachers of geography.

James, in the same department as Mike, tells a brief anecdote about an external examiner which serves to illustrate his own identification with teaching as a valid priority over research. He describes a visit from an external examiner who criticized the amount of time and effort apparently going in to feedback on students' scripts:

*[He] thought we were doing too much ... because we're a teaching-led university I think our tradition's always been to put time and effort into that ... he was coming from a research point of view, 'how on earth have you got time to write research proposals if you're doing this much writing on your student's work' ... it's striking someone who would just put a few ticks and a number, I suspect, on student work.*

James' gloss on the external examiner's criticism here firmly establishes his identification with teaching as an institutional priority: the examiner, coming from a "research point of view" is pictured as being the sort of person who puts just "a few ticks and a number" on a student's script by way of feedback – in contrast to the "time and effort" made at James' institution. Like Deborah, James articulates a perceived clash between research and teaching as institutional priorities: his own affiliations are made clear through the contrast he sets up here between different feedback-giving practices.

### *6.3.2 Teachers, not academics*

For some participants, who shared the positive identification with teaching described above, this was articulated sharply in terms of a contrast with the



perceived identity of “academic”. For example, Paul (NU2) appears to be more positive about embracing a “teacher” identity than about identifying as an “academic”, a word which he uses rather negatively in most instances to denote a staff member’s sense that they are above students, in an exclusive club which the students may not be good enough to join. Paul’s use of both terms shows that his sense of identity as a teacher is underpinned by a desire to start from the assumption that students too could be in his position, since he himself was a ‘non-traditional’ mature undergraduate. This is played out in some of his practices around student writing, for example:

*I would like to always present the view of them that ‘when you are an academic you’ll just need to have these things [knowledge of referencing conventions]’, rather than ‘well you’re never going to be at that level ... so therefore I don’t have to tell you why ... don’t worry your little mind with that, you just follow these rules and you might just scrape through with a bit of paper’.*

Here he clearly distinguishes himself from colleagues who maintain a hierarchical relationship with students, in his ‘voicing’ of the patronising attitude of an imaginary colleague who does not believe that students themselves have the potential to be “academic” too. Later in the same interview Paul again constructs his position in opposition to that of another imaginary colleague:

*If you’re not going to try and help [“the skills”] and address that, then what’s the point, because you’re acknowledging that there’s a fair chance it’s either never*

*going to happen at all, or it's certainly not going to happen to the level that you would like in your very sort of highbrow academic way.*

Paul, relatively new to university teaching, associates an attitude which dismisses the university teacher's role in helping students to write effectively with a different sort of institution than his own, where as an academic teacher

*you just don't go near this kind of very low level ... secondary school type stuff.*

Thus, although Paul considers that student writing should be a priority for him, he nevertheless associates it with "secondary school". His stance towards the academic "highbrow" reinforces his attitude that an academic teacher's job should be to tackle "low level" stuff such as writing and reading in order to give students a chance. This suggests that for Paul, helping students succeed involves having the humility to be prepared to tackle the basics (see also 7.3.2).

Similarly, Pam is appalled by academics she knows at RGU who she feels treat students as a "nuisance". She hates the posturing of university life which she feels places students at a disadvantage in the hierarchy and gives staff a sometimes frightening and excluding power and authority over students:

*It's all power things ... the signals we send out 'closed doors', 'doctor something'; 'you can only make a point then stop bothering me'.*

She feels that students are still frightened of some staff:

*I've seen students scared and having to clear their throats when they're knocking on my colleagues' doors, standing shaking outside the door.*

Like Paul, Pam appears to identify strongly with the student experience here and to see her role as a teacher as being to reduce such hierarchies and fear. However, professional identities are shifting and contingent in nature: at other times, a “teacher” identity signals a more asymmetrical pedagogical relationship for Pam; for example she explains that she sometimes likes to use red ink in feedback in order “to show them that I’m the teacher, ‘cause I’m in red”. Thus in Pam’s practices around student writing she aligns herself with different facets of an academic teacher identity at different times.

### *6.3.3 Professionals (who teach professionals)*

Martin, a clinical paediatrician at RGU’s medical school, speaks positively about the half day a week he spends leading and teaching an undergraduate course:

*Sharing one’s experience and learning with the next generation, well it’s a privilege.*

He refers to himself as a teacher in an unmarked<sup>27</sup> way several times during our single interview. However, he is acutely aware that institutional priorities are different:

*[RGU] sees teaching as a core activity but not as an income-generating activity, therefore it's given secondary importance.*

The difficulties caused by this he says are similar in other “RAE-geared”<sup>28</sup> universities he knows as an external advisor. Martin depicts himself as something of a maverick for having even attended a university-run course about teaching, drawing “bemused” reactions from medical school colleagues. However, later in the interview, when dissertations come up, Martin explicitly distances himself from another course team member who is

*our educationalist ... a nurse who's had an educational training and so she's always on our case to do things properly; we're busy clinicians doing it by the seat of our pants ... so there's an interesting tension.*

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<sup>27</sup> I use this term to indicate that Martin used the word without any particular intonational attitude, as a ‘given’.

<sup>28</sup> The Research Assessment Exercise, an audit of university research output, now replaced by the Research Excellence Framework in the UK.

He also describes his role as helping students “to steer their career ... not as their teacher, as their senior colleague”. These and other comments made by Martin suggest that he identifies primarily as a clinician working with the “next generation” of medics, as opposed to being an “educationalist”, and that there are few incentives for him to embrace a pedagogic identity in his context.

Tom, at OBU, is also similarly committed to the teaching dimension of his role, and talks like Martin and others of the competition between research and teaching priorities in his institution. He comments that the teaching style in his context, particularly the role of essays in tutorials, has changed as a direct result of

*the pressure on us all to research and publish ... that is absolutely now by **far and away** the number one priority ... I would go so far as to say that there are some in the Faculty who take the view that they think teaching is irrelevant [Tom's emphasis].*

Thus Tom distinguishes himself from others in his institution who are not committed to teaching. However, like Martin, he appears to be primarily attached to a professional identity, in his case as a lawyer (see 4.3.1). He sees it as his job to

*produce the best law graduates I can, so that when they go off invariably to work in a career in law they're good lawyers.*

Tom explains that he has reluctantly taken on some responsibility for helping students with writing skills, even though “[he’s] no English teacher”, partly because

*if students are not doing as well as they should simply because of basic writing skills then I think that is a serious problem that we have to try and address.*

Tom’s concern is not just related to students’ final academic outcomes: his choice to make these changes may stem equally from the pressure of reputation coming from his professional links outside the institution. In Tom’s dramatised exchange with an imaginary legal colleague about “these people” Tom is “producing” who “can’t write”, presented in part in section 4.3.4, Tom goes on to pose an imaginary rhetorical question: “well is it my job to teach them how to write, you know?” His imaginary colleague responds with the words “Yes, yes, it’s terrible”. Tom thus conveys a sense that he and colleagues in the legal profession agree that attention to student writing is hardly his job, and thus is taken on reluctantly, because others (by implication, school teachers) have deplorably failed to do their job properly.

#### *6.3.4 Researchers, not teachers*

Other participants who understood themselves to be in a “research-led” setting were also ambivalent about teaching as an aspect of their professional identity, particularly where this might involve student writing. Those who were not in the vocational disciplines of Law and Medicine, however, did not have available the same notion that their teaching role was about “producing” the “next generation” of

colleagues. For example, two other participants at RGU expressed ambivalence about teaching and a teaching identity. Dan sees himself as one of the more committed teachers in his Geography department; he has attended a university course to support his teaching and uses some of what he has learned in everyday practice. At one point he remarks that he and departmental colleagues are well “protected” in terms of teaching load, immediately afterwards wryly remarking that this seems to be “the wrong sort of expression to use in education”. Dan appears to see a certain irony in the notion that one should have to be “protected” from teaching in an institution which exists to educate (see also 5.5.2). Emma, in Computer Science, is blunter. Although she takes an active interest in teaching (see 4.2.1), in an interview she describes her teaching work – and in particular the efforts she makes to develop student writing - as “worth zero” for her career. She explains:

*I will not ever go to a teaching university, and there [at a research-oriented institution] ... my research ... is what counts.*

In this type of research-led environment a teaching identity compares unfavourably with a more valued researcher identity.

Conflicts experienced by some participants over whether they could afford to be *seen* as committed to teaching were particularly intense when it came to work with student writing. Dan has devised a marking grid for student feedback which has been “redistributed” amongst colleagues at the request of the examinations officer

as an example of “best practice” (see Window 4: 217). However, he also remarked:

*You wouldn't [want to] be seen to devote too much attention to writing skills, that ain't going to get you a professorship, you know what I mean [laughter]?*

Dan's unusual use here of a non-standard verb form (“ain't”) seems to signal his sense of the unofficial, ‘down-to-earth’ reality of the low value of work around student writing in his research-intensive institution. Although Dan was very happy to take credit for his efforts to improve student writing with me as an outsider, he appeared to be wary of attracting the wrong sort of attention for this within his research-led context, fearing that it could have material negative effects on his career.

#### *6.3.5 “I'm nobody's mum in this University”: drawing boundaries around work with students*

In this section I trace how participants' discourses of identity often signalled that they were seeking to set *boundaries* around work with student writing, in order to manage the challenging lived realities of this work. Participants often invoked (usually in order to reject) certain identities – social worker, mother, child nurse, school teacher – where it came to their work with student writing, as a way to negotiate relationships with students and colleagues and also, to echo Dan's words, as “protection”, against potential encroachments on their time, their reputation, or on their prized autonomy.



The sense that students' "writing skills" are not part of a university teacher's remit was not confined to participants based in prestigious, research-intensive institutions. For example, Pam, at DLU, is adamant that certain types of support for student writing are beyond her role:

*If they've got problems, they need to get somebody else 'cause I'm not a social worker and I'm not their mum ... so things like spelling, paragraph construction, commas, etiquette ... I'm not paid to do that with DLU, I'm getting paid to (.) teach.*

Pam here uses interesting metaphors here to describe work around student writing: she associates certain aspects of this work with a caring role such as social worker or "mum", as opposed to being part of a disciplinary teaching remit (in this case, in Psychology). Later in the same interview, she adds:

*When the students are begging me for things I just think 'I really need to direct you on to somebody else who might have more time and patience and actually get paid for it'.*

Here, the lack of institutional acknowledgement of such work, and its emotional/relational dimension, in the context of low staff/student ratios, are expressed very clearly. These, along with Pam's other references to students being "just out of nappies", needing "hand-holding" and "reassurance rather than teaching", conjure up images of students-as-children clamouring for help, whose

many needs are too overwhelming to be met by a disciplinary teacher. In a very different context, Angela (OBU) talks about how she learned the benefits of setting challenging work for students: “it was a lesson for me not to baby them too much.” These wordings represent ways of drawing the line between what should and should not be an academic teacher’s job where writing is concerned. Russell uses a telling metaphor to describe the process of referring students to “support” provision to get help with their writing. He is describing a university cross-faculty committee at P92U, which is trying work out “the best way to encourage skill development in undergraduates”:

*We really need to do something a bit more woomph to them to get them to know what it’s like to be an undergraduate with an ability to go out and have certain skills, not make it specialised ‘oh, they’re not that good, let’s send [them] off to Auntie Floss down the road and she’ll sort them out’ you know [Russell laughs].*

Although Russell is suggesting that work with student writing should be (re)located in the faculties, his invocation of “Auntie Floss” conjures up an arguably patronising image of “specialised” writing provision in the form of a sub-professional, mother- (or perhaps elderly aunt-) figure – which runs counter to his apparent rejection of a deficit/discrete approach. In section 7.2.5 I revisit notions of the personal and of care in university writing work, as they surface in this study.

### 6.3.6 Not “proper teachers”: drawing boundaries around work with colleagues

Paul emphasises his position as a relative newcomer to academic life, having entered his post from industry, and is modest about his own knowledge of teaching, telling me “I’m not an expert on pedagogy”. Emma expresses a similar sense of not being an expert in education: here she explains her ‘hands off’ approach with a colleague on a second year module:

*I think that neither of us considers ourselves as proper teachers, we are researchers, right? ... I have ideas about teaching and about how to facilitate learning but they are very, very different from other ideas that colleagues here have and ... whilst I know that I don’t agree with what I see, I don’t see myself as that superior with the whole theory that I would say well, no, no you’re wrong.*

Here Emma’s rejection of a “teacher” identity appears to be linked for her to a particular, autonomous working culture around academic teaching in her context: “proper teachers” might tell someone else how to do their job better (like Martin’s “educationalist” colleague, who is “always on [his] case to do things properly” see 6.3.3 above). However authoritative she may feel as a researcher, Emma does not wish to claim this authority when it comes to teaching. Dan, in the same institution, demurs when I refer to my understanding that the feedback matrix he has developed has been “shared as good practice”; he takes trouble to emphasise that although it has been sent round as “best practice”:

*Whatever style [colleagues] come up with they've just got to feed back more ... rather than a prescriptive ... 'you've got to do this' which is often a better way to deal with academics.*

Academic teacher identities here dovetail with the ways in which practice is – and is not – disseminated amongst colleagues. Questions of how autonomy as an aspect of academic identity, and its converse experienced through institutional regulation, impact on the practices of participants in the study around student writing, are addressed in the following section.

#### ***6.4 Working with colleagues around student writing: autonomy, consistency and desires for collaboration***

##### *6.4.1 Autonomy: an academic value under threat?*

Above I showed that participants' sense of themselves and of how they appear to others in their institutional contexts and beyond plays an important role in shaping their practices around student writing, as they position themselves in relation to a range of "possibilities" for professional "selfhood" (Ivanič, 2004) with varying degrees of prestige in their contexts. In this section I focus on another key aspect of professional identity, that of autonomy. Academic staff expect to possess high degrees of self-determination and the right to make independent judgments. At the same time, autonomy is widely regarded as being under threat in UK universities through a combination of developments: marketisation, reduced state funding, increasing regulation and the rise of the audit culture (Ball, 2003; Evans, 2004; Clegg, 2008; O'Neill, 2002). The experience of work with student writing as it

emerged in the accounts of participants in this study bears out this documented tension between regulation and autonomy.

Several participants referred to a perceived increase in the amount of bureaucracy and regulation in recent times. For example, giving the example of the introduction of a particular version of Harvard referencing across the institution, James comments:

*All these things [practices around student writing] are policy driven, it's not really ... down to the individual tutor; much of the advice that's given to students in handbooks has become part of departmental [practice].*

Robert comments that even module titles are no longer in the remit of the individual lecturer who leads the module:

*We used to have something last year called 'Geographical Inquiry' ... but that was apparently not Ronseal<sup>29</sup> enough so we've got 'Study Skills for Geographers' now ... the choice of titles for things seems to be driven by administration rather than by any kind of creativity on the part of module leaders, which is sad really.*

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<sup>29</sup> A reference to an advertisement campaign for a wood sealant product sold in the UK, which claims that "it does what it says on the tin".

Robert's comment here presumes a tension between administrative requirements and the individual creative decisions of academic teaching staff. Robert's own stance here in relation to these competing discourses is clear: in the analysis which follows, I aim to show that, in their practices around student writing, all participants were engaged in negotiating a position on the (dis)continuum between bureaucracy and regulation on one hand, and autonomous choices and personal priorities on the other. My focus is on how identities were played out in relation to others: students, colleagues, and institutional decision-makers.

#### *6.4.2 Degrees of autonomy*

Participants differed in the degree of autonomy they appeared to experience in their work with students generally and in connection with writing, with institutional context playing a major part in shaping this. At one end of the spectrum, Angela, a postgraduate student who has taken on some optional undergraduate teaching in Anthropology at OBU, appears to experience a surfeit of autonomy, which at times feels more like isolation than self-determination. As a freelance teacher, she has no teaching 'base', but books a space for her classes in the Department where she is a graduate student (her own College office is too small even for a one-to-one tutorial). She has had little feedback from those who have employed her to teach these students and has no useful role-modelling from her own doctoral supervisors. She has devised a curriculum/reading list for students more or less from scratch (though borrowing informally from other postgraduate teachers), writes her own assignment questions, and has drafted her own student evaluation form. She expresses shock at the "idiosyncratic" lack of central organization of the curriculum or of teaching. Her only contact with teaching colleagues is through a

group of postgraduate teachers like herself who meet voluntarily once a week to discuss teaching and related issues. Tom, also based at OBU, appears to be similarly independent in deciding how to spend the time available for teaching undergraduates, accountable to no higher authority, as we saw in section 4.3. However, for Tom, who unlike Angela is a senior and well-established College and Faculty member, this freedom involves less isolation or vulnerability.

At the other end of the spectrum from the OBU participants in the study, those working as part time tutors in other institutions seemed to convey the strongest sense of having limited freedom to exercise their own judgment in how to approach student writing. In some cases this was probably a reflection of the nature of their teaching role in a distance learning context, as well as of part time status. Pam, comments openly that “there’s little room for initiative” in her role at DLU, though she has experienced this in some face-to-face institutions too. Russell, also teaching part time for DLU, uses terms to describe his relationship with the institution which suggest a sense of limited personal autonomy: for example, he describes university monitoring of online teaching forums as involving “degrees of surveillance”, and calls a message from the central academic team a “directive” (see also Window 2: 195).

However, autonomy in work around writing was not just a question of a passive response to institutional context, or of an ascribed identity within it, but also sometimes involved participants’ strategic deployment of more or less autonomous/regulated identities, for example in order to place boundaries around their workload or the expectations of students. Like Sue in section 4.5.4,

sometimes participants appeared to adopt a strategy of framing themselves as having reduced autonomy, as a means of managing students' expectations of their work around writing. For example, Mike (NU1) sometimes finds himself apologising to students for returning work later than the official turnaround deadline:

*I hadn't returned the work quickly enough and I knew and I just had to apologise 'I'm just so sorry, it's not ready ... please understand I'm busy with other things and you are still my priority, but it's a very small piece of work'*

Here Mike appeals to the students' patience by drawing on his identity as an employee bound by numerous demands and requirements, in this case to help him manage their expectations of 'turnaround' time on an essay-style assignment. This example (along with Sue's) illustrates that participants were able to foreground autonomy or otherwise in their relationships within the institution.

#### *6.4.3 Autonomy for academic teachers as a threat to consistency for students.*

Although individual autonomy was generally valued by participants in the study, limits placed on their professional autonomy were not always perceived in a negative light, particularly where there was a concern that diversity of approach might create - or give the impression of - inconsistency or unfairness for students. Diane (NU2), as Faculty Academic Conduct Officer, laments the fact that too many tutors "brush over" guidelines on reporting instances of plagiarism, on the grounds that this creates inconsistency and unfairness for students:



*If it's not recorded and you do get students coming in [to formal plagiarism meetings] ... being suspected in one module, saying [slightly less RP – slightly resentful tone] 'well I did it like that in other modules'”*

James (NU1), as a senior member of staff, appears to identify broadly with increases in regulation of practice around student writing.<sup>30</sup> He explains how his department has recently instituted explicit guidelines to ensure that dissertation students get a similar amount of help. Before the new guidelines were introduced, he

*was beginning to worry [about] the extent to which the weaker students, their final marks were being artificially raised somewhat [through flexible dissertation support].*

He also explains that practices around student writing – for example referencing requirements – are

*all becoming much more bureaucracy-based, much less down to the individual initiative of the tutor which is a good thing in a way, 'cause then students are ... not being confused by different tutors.*

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<sup>30</sup> During interviews, James often responded to questions about his practice with “we” rather than “I” and occasionally I had to ask him to concentrate specifically on his own individual practice rather than on institutional practices more generally.

James thus sees some standardisation of practice in at least a partially positive light, as a means to create both fairness and consistency for students. Martin (RGU) seems to have a similar sense of unease around aspects of his practice which involve “tinkering” [*sic*] with a student’s written draft before submission. He draws my attention to new regulations for students’ assessed writing which are in part intended to promote “equity”: for example, as in James’ context, there is now a five-hour limit on the amount of dissertation support time any student can have.

Generally, however, despite the attractions of consistency, especially for reasons of fairness (see 5.3), participants seemed to be wary of attempts to standardise their practice. Although some were positive about increased regulation in the interests of students as a whole, they also all in some way demonstrated that they greatly valued – and regularly exercised – their autonomy of judgment when it came to deciding what was in the best interests of *particular* students, even where this meant bending the rules. Regulations were often filtered through individual judgments about what seemed right, fair or helpful at a particular moment. For example, in Paul’s institution (NU2), there is a ‘zero tolerance’ policy with regard to plagiarism, where teachers are asked to report even minor offences which, though they may not attract penalties, will nevertheless go “on record”<sup>31</sup>. Paul clearly does not take this line in practice, preferring to coach students explicitly in referencing to “protect” them from the potentially disastrous consequences of getting it wrong (see Window 3: 207): to take the official line would damage mutuality and dialogue in the pedagogic relationship which he clearly values. In her OBU context, Angela

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<sup>31</sup> See also Diane’s comment on guidelines at NU2 above.

accepts essays nearly twice the required length. Russell at DLU comments on students' drafts especially where he feels they deserve a bit of help, even though his institution forbids this:

*If a student is particularly struggling or particularly lacks confidence then I might adopt a more 'ok, I'll have a look at it' ... particularly with foreign students where use of English can be a real barrier to answering the questions effectively.*

This scope can work to the academic teacher's advantage, as well as to the student's: it allows room for individuals to balance judgments about the kind of help a student needs and can benefit from, with what is reasonable from the point of view of teacher workload.

#### *6.4.4 Academic autonomy as a 'fact' of university life*

Participants frequently appeared to view autonomy as fundamental to university life, resulting in a diversity of practice amongst staff members which students simply needed to adjust to. Diane (NU2) comments that academics in her institution have developed a "mode of autonomous working" where people work alone or with small numbers of like-minded colleagues, and largely live and let live. When I ask Robert (P92U) about the differences he appears to be flagging up between his own approach to teaching "study skills" and that of some colleagues, he explains:

*We've grown up over the years to respect what each other is doing, and almost by intuition we've gone off on our own kinds of pathways of teaching.*

These comments are reminiscent of Emma's observation that "every lecturer is an island" (see 4.2.4), and resonate with the discomfort voiced by some participants about telling colleagues how they should teach (see 6.3.8). A respect for colleagues' autonomy was evident even where participants clearly viewed others' practices negatively. A number of examples emerged where participants appeared to avoid seeking to influence the practice of colleagues, even where they might be expected to be in a position to do so. For example, while Martin (RGU) asks students to develop their own question for their written assessed task, he comments on the fact that social science colleagues provide a set list of essay questions, and "this is just a given" for these colleagues:

*I remember the first time – I've been doing this for three or four years now - it was just interesting to me the way that [they said] 'oh here's my list of essay questions' ... 'ah that's how they do it then', was my response.*

Although Martin leads the course, over the three or four years he appears not to have attempted to suggest an alternative approach to his non-Medical colleagues: the "interesting ... contrast in styles" is for students to negotiate their way through. This wryly 'laissez faire' approach contrasts with Martin's account of the nurse/educationalist colleague who "insists" on certain practices, for example, that course team members should not "deface" [= make marks on] students' texts, until she is overruled by the external examiner.

Tom (OBU) writes in his “Handbook for New Students” for new Law undergraduates:

Some tutors will give problem classes, but I am afraid to say that some will stick to essays, even in papers for which problems are compulsory.<sup>32</sup>

There is a clear distancing of Tom from colleagues’ practices here – signalled by his confiding “I am afraid to say” - but no corresponding suggestion that Tom address the issue by not employing these tutors or by asking them to adapt their practice. Instead, Tom’s advice to students is to look at past exam papers to help them work out what is required: the message is that students are responsible for managing the diversity of approach from their teachers, even where colleagues are openly critical of each other’s practices around writing.

This paradoxical position is neatly encapsulated in a group feedback sheet given out by Dan (RGU) to students after marking an assignment in which he acknowledges that students are getting different advice from different teachers about how much knowledge to assume for the imagined reader of their texts:

Do not overdo the description of obvious equations ... Accept that reader knows simple trigonometry. Same goes for definition of s.d. [= standard deviation]. (I accept after

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<sup>32</sup> See Chapter 4.3.2 for explanation of a “problem question”.

discussion and moderation of work [you have done] with Smith that you have been told to define in full.) I suggest a compromise!!

This is a good example of the acceptance of variation between colleagues as a *status quo* which students have to negotiate their way around, rather than lecturers having to seek a compromise themselves. Examples in this section and in section 6.3.6 have shown academic teachers operating somewhat at arm's length from one another. This situation is echoed in Robert's (P92U) description of "colleagues down this corridor" who are all picking up on issues with student writing "in their various ways".

#### *6.4.5 Independence not isolation: informal collaborations around student writing*

One way in which participants in this study appeared to reconcile tensions in their work with student writing between a professional sense of autonomy and the pressures of regulation, between being "tetchily anarchic" (Robert, P92U) on one hand and a "cog in the wheel" (Pam, DLU) on the other, was through informal, often small-scale collaborations, where opportunity and incentive presented themselves. In many cases the most fruitful and satisfying collaborations reported were on a very small scale, even in some cases resulting at least in part from a chance meeting or conversation (e.g. Diane, see 4.4.3). Mike (NU1) describes an encounter in a local pub with a writing specialist from the Student Support Unit which leads to collaborative working on his third year specialist module; the success of this joint enterprise is partly attributed by Mike to its informal origins:

*Because J and I knew each other and I'd had a good relaxed conversation with her perhaps ... she knew exactly what I was trying to achieve with this work so she was really good at directing her advice knowing exactly what the academic staff wanted.*

Angela (OBU) took up the opportunity to join a “unique ... really useful” small self-help group for new teachers, run from within her Faculty, in which agendas were set informally by group members, and included issues such as how to assess a piece of writing, construct a reading list and set a good essay question.

Some participants also reported frequent informal discussions about writing issues in their contexts, for example, Paul (NU2) describes

*the sort of coffee break kind of discussion about ‘oh crikey how much should you correct spelling as you’re going through a piece of work’.*

James (NU1) describes the ‘rogues’ gallery’ practice of putting writing “errors” up for others to see “the more amusing howlers” in students’ writing (a practice also referred to by Dan at RGU), and explains that “corridor mutterings” about student writing happen “all the time”. However, these highly informal practices seemed more geared to letting off steam rather than providing a constructive informal space in which to share ways of approaching student writing.

#### 6.4.6 *Desires for collaborative spaces for disciplinary writing work*

Some participants commented on a lack of dedicated space within their departments and subject areas to discuss student writing in a more constructive way. Diane (NU1) explains that discussions often take place within small “niches”, which are not always “appropriate” in terms of creating consistency for students across their degree study. Emma (RGU) laments the disappearance of a discipline-based staff development forum where practices around teaching were shared – she feels that teaching and learning issues have been “outsourced” to the “teaching and learning” programme (see 4.2.4). This leaves departmental colleagues in a state of mutual misunderstanding, nonplussed about how to tackle familiar “problems” around student writing in their discipline:

*We moan a lot in the department about the quality [of student writing] but we don't know quite what to do with it.*

Emma makes clear what type of staff development around student writing she would prefer:

*My co-lecturer ... says that where he was before ... they had sessions where they came together, the new, the younger ones and the older ones where they just share teaching practices in a chat basically, it was much less formal.*

Similarly, Deborah (P92U) wishes that those who have attended the now compulsory training for new lecturers had more opportunity to share and discuss



what they have learned with subject-based colleagues. Paul (NU2) comments that externally driven agendas, “like responding to the National Student Survey” are discussed at official meetings,

*but the wider debate about skills modules and our expectations of what students should or shouldn't have when they come to us, no that tends to just be occasionally a coffee break discussion and sometimes it's not even that.*

Thus, questions of student writing appeared to be given little space in participants' contexts within constructive/purposeful interactions between disciplinary academic colleagues, leaving individuals generally to pursue their own paths. As we saw above in section 6.4.5, and in Chapter 4, collaborations, exchanges and borrowings of good practice might occur, but these depend on individuals actively seeking assistance from colleagues they know well personally. As Emma (RGU) explains in relation to the second year assignment she marks which has proved highly unpopular with students:

*I don't know what [the module leader]'s going to do with it ... I think it depends really on the relationship you have with colleagues and I have none with **this guy** [my emphasis].*

Emma's use of distancing language here reinforces her sense that she has no influence on what happens with this second year assignment. In a different example, Pam (DLU) comments that the moderator of her marking does not even

introduce herself on the moderation paperwork; Pam apparently feels that “this woman’s” use of first name terms for correspondence over assessment and feedback is false and “tokenistic”. Unsurprisingly, she is disinclined to take on board the moderator’s comments. These data extracts suggest that without the sense of a genuine collegial relationship to underpin it, fruitful exchange of ideas about how to work with student writing is unlikely to occur.

Analysis of the data as a whole suggests that where wider university initiatives existed intended for developing practice around student writing, participants often perceived these as being remote, imposed from above, lacking contextual relevance and more about what was “flavour of the month upstairs” (James) or about “teaching a grandmother to suck eggs” (Tom) than providing a “platform” (Emma) for collegial exchange. Through the ‘voicing’ of managers who are “running around” the institution just before the National Student Survey takes place, Diane conveys a sense that institutional concerns over these matters have an element of the superficial – even of farce – about them:

*[They’re saying] ‘oh we need to be acting on this ... making sure that [feedback] is timely and it’s good and that [students] don’t give us a bad mark in it’.*

Data analysis in this section has shown that, although participants were exercising some autonomy through collaborations and in more solitary circumstances, institutional culture and context (and their position within it) clearly played an important part in shaping their practices. In the following section I explore what we can learn broadly from the study about the ways in which practices arise through a

dynamic relationship between individual academic teachers and the contexts in which they are located.

### **6.5 Individual agency 'in' institutional context**

Participants often took care to point out that much they were doing to develop student writing was possible because of particularly propitious circumstances, such as small student cohorts on some subjects, or a high proportion of allocated time (e.g. Tom in 4.3). Paul is very explicit in this regard:

*I should stress this is a very small cohort, so I do appreciate where we have colleagues who are working with modules with 150, 200 students ... it simply wouldn't be achievable.*

These explanations downplay participants' agency in adopting particular practices, emphasising that particular circumstances of context are beyond their control, perhaps because this enabled them to avoid implicitly criticising colleagues whose practice differs from their own.

Despite these clear signs that participants were playing down their agency to avoid criticism of "others who might think differently" (Paul), a picture emerged of academic teachers playing an active role in working with the affordances of institutional context. Participants were often active in introducing change in practice around student writing, whether in response to external circumstances and pressures or not. For example, they engaged in curriculum planning, and

revised assessments, sometimes in response to perceived problems in student writing (e.g. see Window no. 3: 207). In Window 4: 217 we saw how Dan's own practices, developed when he attended some teacher training, e.g. using a matrix to structure written feedback or supplying a group feedback sheet, have become a "base line" in wider departmental practice. Some participants introduced innovations in response to broader curriculum changes at institutional level. For example, Mike sees the 'de-semesterisation' of the curriculum in his university as a "massive opportunity to get new exciting content in": he has taken the chance to radically rewrite the way in which a first year "Geographical Skills" module is delivered, to emphasise "content", "problem-based learning" and project work. Paul describes a "feedback fair" set up by a group of colleagues in his department, where a very large cohort of first year students received one-to-one feedback on an early piece of writing, by means of a post-office type queuing system, with a number of lecturers on hand over the course of one afternoon. Deborah achieved a compromise within her department which enables her to provide interactive sessions focused on developing student writing. She explains that, following tough negotiations, the core curriculum for the following year will be divided into two sections, a cheaper, lecture-based "content-heavy" and a workshop-style "core module": colleagues will work on whichever they're comfortable with. In a resource-strapped situation, Deborah has engaged in a creative trade-off which makes a virtue of pedagogical differences within her department, in order to make space for her preferred way of working.

## **6.6 Concluding comments**

In this chapter I have shown that participants' experiences and practices around student writing draw on resources which were configured partly through personal and institutional systems of value which underpin their work. Work around writing is time- and effort-consuming and individuals negotiated ways to resource this aspect of their practice in part through their – and others' – perceptions of what was 'worthwhile'. These choices are not always easy: conflicts about how individuals saw themselves and were seen by others in their working contexts played an important role in negotiations of practice. Academic teachers in the study sometimes struggled to reconcile a desire to engage meaningfully with student writing with the low status and perceived invisibility of such work. In some contexts, delicate questions of status and reputation – within and beyond the institution – had to be negotiated when making decisions about how to approach students' written work, for example when to give an 'extra' class or raise a writing issue with a teaching colleague. These tensions shaped and were signalled through the adoption of particular practices and through pedagogic and collegial relationships.

Participants' valorised teacher/non-teacher identities within and beyond their institutions have an important bearing on whether and how academic teachers see their responsibilities around student writing: on how they found real answers to Tom's rhetorical question "Is it my job to teach them how to write?" Their identities as teachers, professionals, academics and researchers are bound up with this question, and individual participants attempt to answer it for themselves partly in terms of other available identities – social worker, mother, school teacher,

educationalist, pedagogue. Rejection of these identities dovetails temptingly with the idea that responsibility for writing can be transferred to others who should (have) sort(ed) it out, and so with a notion of writing itself as a decontextualised skill. Less frequently, the same understanding entails a conscious decision to put disciplinary concerns on the back burner in one's own work, in order to make way for writing (e.g. Paul, and more reluctantly, Tom). In this case the solution is deemed to lie with disciplinary staff but only at the expense of attention to the "academic" or to disciplinary "content". The question of academic teachers' understandings of writing and writing work and its place in the academy is revisited in greater depth in Chapter 7.

Questions of identity in a culture of academic autonomy, though tempered by a desire to create consistency for students, also seemed frequently to inhibit the notion that academic teachers should talk to colleagues about how to improve work with student writing. Students were generally seen as responsible for managing the contradictory practices of academic teachers and the resulting diversity of study experience. Sometimes, however, participants were engaged in small-scale collaborative practice with "like-minded colleagues" (Paul, NU2) in their disciplines with the aim of developing better ways of working. Collaboration on a smaller scale with a personal connection was highly valued by some participants; it provided them with the necessary sense of autonomy and 'ownership' to engage them constructively in developing their students' writing. There was evidence of a desire for a more full-blown collegiate approach, where space is provided institutionally in disciplinary localities for more and less experienced colleagues to talk to each other about how they do things, share good ideas and what has worked for them. This desired (but often not realised) space

seems to resemble a version of Lave and Wenger's vision of the "community of practice" (1991) (see section 1.4.2). For some participants, this desire was more realisable, for example, both Tom and Martin (a lawyer and doctor respectively) were to some extent able to resolve tensions around work around writing through an attachment to a professional disciplinary identity in which academic teaching was understood as a form of coaching and development of junior members of the profession.

The analysis in this chapter has been not so much concerned with 'given' institutional differences per se, as with the ways in which individuals work *with* particular configurations of context; how they construct their context, and position themselves within it through their practice. Although some aspects of individual practice might be understood as a straightforward response to institutional contextual factors experienced as beyond their control, such as the level of study, the cohort size, or institutional procedures, there was also evidence that participants actively engaged in strategies aimed at doing something different and better with student writing where time and space could be found. Although institutional cultures and constraints clearly play a major and partially non-negotiable part in shaping teachers' practices, these examples illustrate that participants were not passively responding to their institutional context or their ascribed position within it; they were making choices about how far and when to conform to institutional requirements, regulations or expectations. Individuals saw themselves as *making* time and space for more satisfactory ways of working where this represented a worthwhile investment. Thus a picture emerged of academic teachers *carving out* some space for fruitful ways of working with student writing, reconfiguring context in order to maximise the resources available

for work they considered to be worthwhile. This process inevitably involved participants in negotiations, trade-offs and choices. This suggests that practice is best understood as the outcome of a dynamic relationship to context, in which individual academic teachers actively draw on and configure the resources available to them to work with student writing within their disciplinary teaching.

In the chapter which follows, I continue with a thematic approach to analysis, drawing on data from across the study. However, the next chapter also represents a shift in perspective further towards the analysts' 'etic' view, taking the discussion further beyond participants' own accounts, understandings and voices and how these index or resist institutional discourses, towards an exploration of how the practices represented can be understood as keying individual academic teachers into wider discourses of writing and writing work in UK Higher Education.



## Chapter 7: Writing and writing work in the academy

### 7.1 Introduction

#### 7.1.1 *The separation of writing from learning and teaching in the disciplines*

This chapter builds on a key theme emerging in earlier data analysis presented in the thesis, specifically the discourses of writing and writing work in circulation in participants' institutional and disciplinary contexts and their consequences for practice. I explore these discourses of writing and writing work as drawn on by academic teachers in order to construct a central thesis about the positioning of work around student writing in the contemporary academy. I argue that student writing and learning (and so teaching) in the disciplines are being driven apart in UK HE, with real and problematic consequences for teachers and students, and for the role of writing at university. The more vigorously dominant discourses of writing diverge from discourses of knowledge-making (while gravitating towards discourses of skills, deficits, academic convention and 'objectivity'), the harder (more strenuous, more challenging) the work involved for academic teachers in bringing writing and meaning-making together. The more powerfully this discursive divide is sustained by institutional patterns of value and resourcing, the greater the costs and risks to individuals who through their practice seek to value student writing as a site of disciplinary meaning-making and learning. I show how attempts to take responsibility for writing within disciplinary teaching may be blown off course through the power of this entrenched discursive divide, sometimes ending up in quasi-disciplinary spaces such as those provided by more institutionally favoured agendas such as 'study skills', 'employability' and 'personal development

planning'. I argue that autonomous discourses of academic writing foster a situation in which writing work can be pushed more easily into penumbral 'grey areas' of academic teaching responsibility, where it may be particularly burdensome, undertaken by individuals acting alone, and unevenly distributed, with likely negative consequences for students as well as teachers. Where they are convinced of the benefits, and especially where there are opportunities to work productively with colleagues, some academic teachers find ways to carve out spaces for bringing writing, learning and disciplinary meaning-making together: however, here I argue that these spaces are more often desired than real, more precarious than sustainable.

#### *7.1.2 Connecting practice and discourse*

One recurring theme of an academic literacies approach is that individuals' practices in connection with writing in the academy are associated with particular ways of understanding what writing is, does and should do in higher education (see 2.2.3). Earlier chapters of this thesis have in different ways thrown light on participants' understandings of writing and writing work in the academy as played out in their words and practices. In Chapter 5, three salient emerging preoccupations guiding practice - fairness, safety and accountability – were linked in different ways to particular notions of academic writing, most often as a post-hoc demonstration of what has been learned, rather than itself a site of intellectual endeavour and learning, and as impersonal and hence amenable to 'objective' assessment. In Chapter 6, participants' notions of what was and was not 'their job' where it came to student writing were shown to be bound up with particular understandings of writing and its place in the academy. Specifically, a view of

writing as a transferable skill chimed with the view that student writing was not primarily the concern of the academic teacher in the discipline and could legitimately be transferred to others. This chapter moves away from a focus on ways of ‘getting things done’ around student writing emerging in the study, towards a primary focus on participants’ particular ways of articulating and thinking about writing – in other words from practices to discourses.

The relationship between practice and discourse is complex, contested and far from being resolved by theories of literacies as social practice. For example, Gee capitalises Discourse and conceptualises it in very broad terms as encompassing what people *do* as well as “ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools and objects” (1999: 201) to enact social identities. Others treat practice as primary and see discourse as an aspect of practice (e.g. Ivanič *et al.*, 2007). While the emphasis varies, most attempts to define the connection between action and language in terms of practices and discourses see them as dynamically and intimately related. In this discussion I will adopt the broad understanding that discourses and practices are each an important part of the other – not precisely the same, but flowing into one another and mutually shaping.

As discussed in 2.2.3 and 2.6.1, the focus of research in academic literacies has mainly been on the practices of writers themselves (particularly student writers, but also latterly academics too) and how these are informed by and feed into particular ways of talking about and understanding writing, for example as decontextualized

“skills”, though the term “discourse” is not always used<sup>33</sup>. This link between practices and discourses has also been traced in relation to other roles around writing, for example language “brokers” such as editors or proof-readers (e.g. Lillis and Curry, 2010; Harwood et al, 2009; see 1.4.2). Discourses of writing provide ways of understanding, naming and recognising not only what writing is, does and should do, but also feed into discourses of writing work: who does it, what they do and should be doing while engaging with student writing.

Of particular importance in this study is the association between discourses of writing and the writing-related practices of teachers. This relationship is the explicit focus of Ivanič’s 2004 paper “Discourses of writing and learning to write” (2004) in which she systematically sets out connections between particular clusters of “associations” (*ibid.*: 220) around writing with particular constructions of the writer-learner and hence with specific writing pedagogies. This pedagogical lens on discourse has much in common with Lea and Street’s three-part characterisation of approaches to writing in academic settings (1998; see 2.2.3). For example, their term “academic socialisation” refers both to implicit assumptions that students will and should acquire the established writing practices of the academy, and also to the more explicit induction into such practices created for them by teachers and others in the university context. In their 1999 paper (see section 2.3.1) Lea and Street further explore the “implicit framings” which academic teachers in their study were drawing on to inform their work with student writers, using both

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<sup>33</sup> For example, Lea and Street (1998: 158-9) refer to different “models”, perspectives or approaches to writing.

interviews and textual data, and point to some of the potentially confusing consequences for students engaging with advice and guidance about writing for assessment in their study contexts. In this chapter I similarly focus on the implicit but variegated framings informing individual academic teachers' practices and trace them in a range of data sources, including those involving communications with students. In section 7.4 I point, like Lea and Street, to consequences for students, but I also consider the consequences for teachers themselves.

It is important to recognise that at any one moment, competing and or complementary discourses may meet, clash, reinforce and co-exist with one another in practices as well as in texts. However, some discourses are more privileged and powerful than others, more likely to be valued, implied in social routines or in ideological 'common sense' (Fairclough, 1992: 87). They are also differently available to individuals as a result of unequal power relations in particular contexts (Blommaert, 2005). There are different levels or 'orders' of discourse (Fairclough, 1992) which may be nested within one another, cluster, or overlap, forming 'constellations'. For example, 'common sense' ways of talking about and viewing language, largely uncontested in the mass media, can be reinforced (or challenged) in discourses circulating on a smaller scale, as in pedagogic approaches and policies in specific education sectors, or on a smaller scale still, in particular institutions. Analysis in this chapter illustrates how heterogeneous and contested discourses of writing are played out in the complex and hybrid practices of individual teachers, within their institutional contexts.

### *7.1.3 Outline of the chapter*

In 7.2 I consider the key discourses of academic writing emerging in the study, and relate these to particular orientations to writing work. In section 7.3 I show how some of these different discourses combine and compete in the practice of individual teachers in the study, in their specific contexts. In 7.4 I explore some of the consequences of the ideological dominance of autonomous models of academic writing for both teachers and students. In section 7.5 I consider the sorts of spaces for work around student writing which academic teachers in the study seek to create in order to bring writing, learning and teaching together. I will show that although sometimes they enjoy a degree of success, their desires as teachers for more meaningful and satisfying ways of working with student writers frequently remain unfulfilled. In section 7.6 I point forward to the final chapter of the thesis where I consider implications of these findings for practice and practitioners. Throughout this chapter I will draw on a range of data sources, as well as linking backward to data analysis in earlier chapters.

## ***7.2 Discourses of writing and writing work in the academy***

As discussed above in section 7.1.2, in a social practice-based approach, discourses of writing can be understood to flow into particular understandings of what it means to work with writing and hence to particular orientations to writing work and particular practices. In this section I briefly explore key discourses of writing which emerged in data across the study and show how these were connected with different understandings of writing work. These discourses fall broadly into two conflicting categories: in sections 7.2.1-7.2.5 I consider those which feed into/derive strength from a 'common sense' autonomous discourse of

language which permeates throughout UK education and society, and which in the HE context entails a view of academic writing as separate from disciplinary learning (see 2.2.2. and 2.2.3); in section 7.2.6, I trace the presence of discourses which approximate more closely to a situated and epistemological notion of writing, less widespread and more contested within and beyond universities in the UK. The analysis of discourses presented here has important implications for practice which will be more fully discussed in Chapter 8.

### *7.2.1 Academic writing as surface, not substance*

In an interview, Angela discusses a student's assignment which she believes is too heavily "signposted":

*I've been saying 'you need to **let the ideas shine through** ... it's ... **sacrificing clarity, the point of [signposting] is to be clear but if you do it too much, it actually obscures your ideas** [my emphasis].*

Mike comments on his 'marking' audio-recording that because assignments have to be presented in the university's "house style" and so are visually identical, the marking process is "all about the content, which is just as it should be". In an interview he also makes clear that, in the absence of an official policy on the matter, he does not indicate spelling errors on student scripts beyond the first page: "because that's not what I'm paid to do, I'm paid to mark content".

To some extent, participants' understandings of the research project played a role in highlighting the language/surface versus content/substance distinction illustrated in these extracts from Mike and Angela (see 3.5.3). However, its presence in pre-existing textual materials lends weight to the claim that the language/content distinction was not merely an artefact of the research process. For example, a sample assessment framework Diane brings to interview (see Figure 8) allocates marks for each section of the assignment, adding up to 100%, while structure, format, presentation, grammar and spelling are described as "general criteria" detailed separately at the bottom of the page. Rather than carrying potential marks, students are reminded that these general criteria "may lead to *loss of marks*" [*my emphasis*]. Some of these general criteria are expanded for students through the use of questions, following the format of the paragraphs above; however, "structure" is not glossed in this way. If Diane is clear in her own mind what she means by this term, her understanding has not been made explicit for the student. A literacies-based explanation for this is that it is difficult to use the word "structure" meaningfully as a discrete, general term, separate from 'content' that is to be structured. The language/content distinction embodied in the textual layout both reifies and obscures the idea of what good structure might mean in this case, while at the same time positioning it as a potential problem or threat to good marks.



Table 2. Assessment criteria and weighting for each section of the presentation		
Section	Questions	Weighting
Introduction	Does it indicate the general significance of the topic as an area of study?	10%
	Does it allow the reader to establish an outline of the study? <b>Are the aims and objectives of the study appropriate and stated clearly?</b>	5
Observation Method and Execution	Has the notation method been clearly explained?	25%
	Are all the definitions included? Has sufficient consideration of errors been presented? Is there evidence of reliability studies? <b>Was the design and execution appropriate for the aims and objectives of the study?</b>	
Results and Statistical Analysis	Are all the relevant data presented?	35%
	Does the data presentation focus on the key issues or trends? Have the data been presented clearly and concisely? Is there repetition of data presentation? Have the correct statistical analyses been performed, where appropriate? <b>Does the section progress smoothly &amp; logically, using the data to tell a story?</b>	
Interpretation and Conclusions	Are appropriate explanations and interpretations of the findings provided? Does the interpretation of the data follow from the data presented? Have the right conclusions been drawn from the data? Have the appropriate implications of the findings been considered? <b>Does the author demonstrate how observation data can be used to improve performance?</b> Is there evidence of an appropriate level of analysis and synthesis?	16 30%
<b>General Criteria that will apply to all sections and may lead to loss of marks:</b>		
Structure, format, presentation, grammar and spelling.	Is the presentation formatted appropriately? Is the general standard of presentation sufficiently high? Are there an acceptably small number of problems with spelling, grammar and punctuation? <b>Are there an acceptably small number of problems with English usage?</b>	
Referencing	Have references been used effectively to support the ideas presented? Have references been acknowledged appropriately? Are references provided using the Harvard Referencing System?	

Figure 8: Diane: assessment criteria for level 2 Sports Science project

See Appendix L(9)

These data extracts show that what Turner calls the “transparency conception for language” (2011) is alive and well in the discourses drawn on by participants in this study. As Turner explains, this understanding of language is based on two interlocking and somewhat paradoxical premises: firstly, that language and content/knowledge are separate from one another, and secondly that the role of language is to represent knowledge by mirroring it as closely as possible, such that language itself remains ‘invisible’ when it is being used well, and departures from this normalised state of affairs are “noticed only in the breach” (*ibid.*: 87), as in the example above where it attracts only a “loss of marks”. Hence, “transparency” models enable discourses of language as deficit to circulate more widely than other available discourses such as knowledge-making, learning and exploration. In turn, this means that language work is understood as remedial but superficial (see 2.7.2). The academic teacher’s role is therefore understood as ideally to judge a student’s ideas without reference to the language in which they are ‘expressed’: to ignore or look ‘through’ language, and to give it minimal attention. This ideal is frustrated when surface errors or infelicities obscure the view, and so in interviews the idea that language should not be the academic teacher’s focus also emerges as a source of struggle, as illustrated in this comment by Diane:

*I think there’s a lot of people when they’re new to lecturing concentrate on those grammatical errors, structure errors, rather than **looking past that and looking at the content** of what they’re trying to say and I try not to do that any more and **yet I can’t help myself** you know if somebody spelled there instead of their, you know [my emphasis].*

An analysis of interview data generated in the present study as dynamic interaction (see 3.6.3) enabled me to trace the way in which a preoccupation with writing as an ideally transparent ‘surface’ is more “readily available” (Turner, 2011) than other views of writing in the disciplinary context, and how this fed into a sense that language ought not to be given too much attention by academic teachers in the disciplines. A detailed example is provided in an interview with James. He is concerned to emphasise that language issues must occupy (and be seen to occupy) a minor place in the discipline and assessment of geography:

*Going into it with a fine tooth comb, marking them largely on the basis of their English language, wouldn't be acceptable, so it has to be ... quite a small proportion of the total assessment which you have to allocate to their geographical knowledge and skill.*

James illustrates his point with an imagined example based on spelling: “you can’t fail a student just for getting the spelling wrong”. When I probe a little about how “other aspects of writing” figure in judgments made about written work, he uses another imagined example based on spelling:

*Your common or garden bad spelling student ... but ... who knows what they're talking about, and can put the right case studies in and describe and explain things, is going to pass.*

When I suggest that “describing and explaining” are themselves language-related, James responds:

*Yes, obviously there are different bits of language you can use well and other bits you can't use well, if as I say it's an incomprehensible piece of work it gets zero ... if you can get the gist of something and you think 'oh well there's enough in here to show that the student has done some reading', that has to be credited, even though it might not be spelled well.*

And so our conversation comes back to spelling. One reading of this interaction is that as I probe the apparent language/content divide, it becomes more comfortable for James, in illustrating his point about language needing to be kept in its place, to revert to spelling as an issue than to tackle the potential complexity of a more integrated understanding of language and disciplinary content. James, like other participants, appears to have less ready access to epistemological ways of talking about student writing, even where explicitly invited to do so. Some of participants' frustration with writing work may stem partly from the sparsity of conceptual resources in academic contexts for understanding writing and thinking as more intimately connected, and the lack of readily available discourses about writing other than as either 'invisible', or a superficial problem to be ignored, where possible, in the context of disciplinary writing.

As I showed in section 5.3.2, notions of language as (ideally) transparent feed into not only participants' understanding of how they should be reading student writing, but into other aspects of their assessment practice in the contemporary HE

context. Some were concerned to ensure that criteria for assessing student writing would be 'up front' and 'transparent', in keeping with institutional understandings of their contractual and even quasi-legalistic responsibilities towards students in a market-oriented system. On the other hand, some also seemed cautious about the value of 'transparency' and viewed a certain amount of mystery and puzzlement as desirable in writing for assessment. They were suspicious of over-detailed specification of criteria (see 5.3.2), fearing that it would produce "clones" (Dan) or over-compliance and a reluctance to take productive intellectual risks in written work. As writers, in some cases, of assessment criteria and guidelines, they were also often aware that their own writing did not function in transparent ways for students (for example, Emma and Deborah, see 4.2.2 and 5.3.2). Participants were thus navigating the "tricky space" (Lillis, 2011: 403) between 'transparent surface' discourses and more problematised understandings of writing in their everyday practical decisions about how to set, read and assess student writing.

### *7.2.2 Academic writing as the rules of the academic game.*

One of the concerns expressed by participants regarding attempts to be transparent in assessment was that this feeds into a rule-focused, tick-box orientation to writing on the part of students (see 5.4.3). However, participants' accounts of their own practice around academic writing frequently drew on a similarly reductive discourse, especially where it involved some of the more familiar academic genres such as the essay or academic paper. For example, academic writing was described as a "game to be played" by students or that we all have to play (Robert, Diane, Pam, Dan), a question of "tricks or tips" (Pam), and the more conventional written assessments as a form of "hoop jumping" (Mike,

Diane, James). These metaphors emphasise the conventions and formal requirements of academic writing, rather than learning, meaning or engagement with ideas. Robert found that students on his “Study Skills for Geographers” module would ask him:

*‘Why do we have to play this game?’ well, I say to them ‘You have to play, that’s the game that we’re playing, but there are other things that we can do as well to enrich [the curriculum]’.*

As we saw in section 6.2.3, the other, richer things Robert has in mind here are not connected with writing, but with different forms of representation such as drawing and photography. Pam also seems to contrast students’ writing as a “game” with other aspects of their study (and therefore of her role as a teacher). She believes that “the technicalities of writing ... are etiquette”, she will “really, really help [students] to play those games”, but that fundamentally she is there “to inspire people to read books”.

These metaphors signal an awareness amongst study participants of the danger of their work with student writing being reduced to an inauthentic, trivialised process, a “game” in the narrow, rule-focused sense rather than a form of open-ended “academic play” (Creme, 2008). Participants’ discourses evoked a sense that the routine elements of academic writing have the potential to be reduced to a mechanical set of moves, requiring intellectual engagement neither from the trained student, nor from their trainer the teacher wielding the whip (or the ✓). A discourse of academic writing as the rules of a game voiced a strong sense for

many of the fourteen participants that their everyday practices surrounding student writing, especially those connected with assessment, were drained of a sense of purpose and meaning (see also Window 2: 195, and 5.4, 5.5 and 6.2). Many participants' experience seemed to involve a sense of 'going through the motions', echoed in Emma's comment about tackling a particular batch of fifty scripts: "you wonder why you're doing it" (see 4.2.3).

### *7.2.3 Academic writing as a transferable skill: the example of employability*

In section 6.3.3 we saw how in Tom and Martin's contexts, some of the conflicts over whether and how student writing fits in with their "models of their tasks as teachers" (Creme, 2000: 97) were resolved through recourse to their identities as professionals responsible for producing colleagues of the future. Here I explore the way in which in other participants' contexts, writing appeared to have found a legitimate space within disciplinary teaching partly because it could be explicitly aligned with the transferable skills agenda, in particular the preparation for future employment. Thus, long-established and widespread 'autonomous' discourses of writing as a discrete transferable skill are reinforced within some participants' contexts through the operation of a contemporary, perhaps more ephemeral, HE discourse of 'employability'<sup>34</sup>. For example, Mike explains that there has recently been

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<sup>34</sup> In Tom and Martin's cases, in the disciplines of Law and Medicine respectively, there was no need for the generic term "employability" as this was a given.

*institutionally a driver around including more **direct** and **obvious** employability content [my emphasis]*

in the disciplines, which has enabled some work on writing to be incorporated into the new Geography timetable. Mike's references to being "direct" and "obvious" in this context may signal an intention to make clear to (prospective and current) students that their degree programmes will make them employable; alternatively, the explicitness may be directed towards other stakeholders such as government. Either way, the emphasis subtly suggested is on being *seen* to address employability.

Similarly, some of the institutional legitimacy in Deborah's context of her 'core' History module, which some colleagues do not approve of because it lacks historical 'content', seems to be secured by the perceived relevance of module writing tasks to a generic notion of employability. Deborah describes an assignment set for second level History students as

*all about employability, actually, because instead of writing a standard essay we ask them to write a briefing paper, of the sort that you would write in advance of a meeting at work*

This focus on future employment is echoed in Diane's case, where writing also maintains a foothold in the disciplinary curriculum through its association with employability. In interviews, Diane describes debates within her institution around



academic expectations of student writing. In these discussions, the question of students' ultimate professional destinations seems to be supplanting the question of their disciplinary location while studying:

*Obviously writing skills and written communication are crucial for becoming an effective whatever in the future ... they might have to write reports about clients but they would have their own shorthand or style of writing ... therefore constructing a lab report that's well written, in good prose and syntax and synthesis is maybe something that they don't have to do day to day.*

Diane is beginning to wonder whether she and colleagues should ask students to produce traditional disciplinary genres such as lab reports. These examples point to 'employability' as an institutional and sector-wide discourse which presents both opportunities and dilemmas for academic teachers. On one hand, employability legitimises attention to writing at disciplinary level; on the other, it may discourage the association between writing and learning in the subject, leaning more towards notions of transferability, in this case, forward to students' imagined eventual destinations in the workforce.

#### *7.2.4 Academic writing as student deficit: writing work as care and repair*

Participants often spoke in strong terms about students' 'lack of ability' to write, whether the reason for this was students' individual problems (Sue, Pam), the school system and school teachers (Robert, Deborah, Tom), structural social barriers (Russell, Paul), the rise of information technologies (Diane), or a mixture

of these. A good example is provided by Sue. Prior to the second interview, I sent her an indicative list of the sorts of text which might be useful (see Appendix H). She responded with the offer to provide material about a student:

with severe dyslexia, she has given me her psychological profile, which is very full.

This suggests that Sue associates my research on student writing in part with a psychological interest in student's difficulties. She also sometimes refers to some students' writing skills as "non-existent" or to students who "can't write at all", and in other cases to poor writing being the result of "laziness". Together, these wordings invoke discourses of writing which focus on individual student 'deficits', and conceptualise writing as a discrete, possessable (Sennett, 2006) skill or even as a moral quality which students either have, have lost, or have failed to acquire.

As discussed in section 2.7.3, deficit discourses of student writing imply particular understandings of writing work as a form of 'fixing', mending, or even crash repair (Chanock, 2007). This in turn may lead academic teachers in the disciplines to orient negatively towards such work and to prefer to pass it on to other people in the academy who, like "Auntie Floss", can "sort" students and their writing "out" (see 6.3.5). Deborah (like Paul, see 6.3.2) does not generally pass such work on, but still believes that even though she and colleagues have to tell students about issues of good punctuation and grammar over and over again, they're "very easy to fix".

**Personal Reflection No. 6: 'Mr Fixit'**

*While presenting my research to Open University staff in the Midlands, one member of my audience was particularly enthusiastic in his response. He told me that hearing about it gave him an immense feeling of relief. For years he had been playing a role as a student support tutor, helping individual students who had been referred for "special sessions" to address their academic writing. He had always felt that he was being positioned as "Mr Fixit", often unappreciated, and when it became clear that he could not just "fix" things, felt that he was often perceived to have let students down. I felt extremely glad to know that my research had spoken to him positively in this way. This feeling of being downgraded because you are working with "poor" student writers is something I have experienced personally, while working in an FE college in the language support unit. It reminds me of the imaginary conversations I would have liked to have had with some people at the time. This, I now realise, is part of the complex addressivity involved in academic writing: it is part of where I am coming from/who I am speaking to as I engage in this research, not all of which is normally allowed to leak explicitly into the final draft of an academic text. This addressivity is not incidental but integral to the project's origins and its impact on others.*

An important related discourse envisages notions of 'fixing' more specifically as the mending and patching up of minor injuries (see 2.2.5). This association is subtly signalled in an institutional document produced at NU1, where the new brand of the student support unit (where help with writing is located alongside other services) is represented by the logo of a bold, blue cross shaped like the first aid or pharmacy cross. Another related discourse which emerged in data analysis in section 6.3.5, similarly invokes 'care' but conceptualises students' deficits in terms of immaturity and incapacity - being needy children and babies. These clustered discourses of care and repair are in turn linked to notions of writing work as personal support for students; these will be explored in the next section.

### 7.2.5 Writing as a personal issue: writing work as pastoral support

In section 6.3.5 I showed that participants often located responsibility for student writing in ‘support’ or welfare spaces *outside* the discipline – referring students when it was felt necessary – or leaving students to self-refer as a response to poor grades for written work. This form of boundary setting was signalled discursively for Pam (DLU) especially with the rejection of a “social worker” or maternal identity. In this section I aim to show that writing provision *within* the discipline carried out by academic teachers was also frequently associated with discourses of pastoral care and support.

In some participants’ contexts, there were well-established arrangements linking work around student writing with pastoral care within the Department or School. For example, in Dan’s context at RGU, writing formed part of the curriculum for small group tutorials taught partly by “personal tutors”, of which Dan is one. Mike (NU1) describes the system which has been introduced in his institution:

*You meet them individually ... it’s everything from welfare issues, accommodation problems, my girlfriend’s left me, to how do I get my work into the first class category ... that’s how we talk to them about how to write and things like that, but it’s not formalized in any kind of syllabus, it’s an ‘as necessary’.*

Similarly, Diane (NU2) refers to issues such as “study skills, referencing, academic writing that are going to help [students] settle into university life”. These wordings suggest that student writing development occurs alongside addressing “personal”

and emotional needs within discipline-specific arrangements. The association between writing work and pastoral care was reinforced in some contexts by the tendency for most face-to-face discussion with students about their writing to take the form of informal drop-in practices, on an individual basis (see Mike above).

In the cases of both Mike and Diane, changes in writing provision had coincided with the university-wide introduction of Personal Development Planning (PDP) which entailed a reallocation of resources towards supporting students' writing within their main discipline. Because of the 'independent learner' framework of PDP, responsibility for writing development is seen to lie with the student, who conducts a "self-audit" of "training" needs (Mann, 2008). Mike's phrase "as necessary" suggests that writing has been shunted into a space where it is an option rather than as being integral to disciplinary learning. The association with PDP also links writing further into discourses of employability discussed in section 7.2.3 above. It is possible to discern in these arrangements a discursive wedge being driven between academic study in the discipline on one hand, and writing as part of a "personal" curriculum on the other. Although student writing development may be dealt with by academic teaching staff, writing issues are shifted away from disciplinary spaces, becoming part of support provision. This arrangement might in some ways fulfil a need for a more intimate dialogue around writing, but in the process these conversations may be separated from disciplinary knowledge-making and learning.

All the above understandings of writing and writing work which I have traced in participants' discourses can be said to reinforce one another in some ways; they

are not the same but there is a great deal of interpenetration, for example personal development and employability agendas overlap, and writing as “etiquette” (Pam) signals it as both superficial and about conventions. Not all operate at the same level: contemporary, education-specific and perhaps more ephemeral discourses, such as employability and PDP, gain hold in the context of long-established and enduring views of writing as a transparent medium for the carriage of ideas, views which Turner (2011) traces to their roots in Enlightenment thinking. Across the three previous chapters I have shown that academic teachers often treat writing work with students as external, additional or otherwise peripheral to the academic. In addition, above I have shown that even when individual academic teachers take responsibility for student writing, it often remains conceptually and in practical pedagogical terms separate from disciplinary learning, knowledge and ‘content’.

#### *7.2.6 Writing as disciplinary learning and knowledge-making*

Despite the dominance of autonomous discourses of writing in the talk and practices of participants, the in-depth approach of the study afforded some glimpses of practice informed by a more integrated, epistemological discourse. Data from Sue (DLU) furnish a useful example. In interviews and other conversations with me as researcher, where writing is consciously on the agenda, Sue appears to draw on a ‘transparency’ model, focusing frequently on what might be termed ‘surface features’; in section 7.2.4 I showed that she also often framed student writing in terms of individual deficits. However, analysis of the “talk around text” generated in Sue’s audio recording made while marking complicates this picture. Sue is marking a level 1 Science assignment, one part of which involves examining several rock samples and drawing conclusions from the observations

(see Figure 9). During the marking of one script, she comments that the student is “mixing sentences up”. It becomes clear that what she means is that he is putting the rock type and how it has been formed first, and then describing the appearance of the samples but using text book descriptions of the rock type rather than his own observations. Sue makes remarks about students taking “short cuts” rather than wanting to do their own observations, adding “that’s not learning, I’d say”.

(a) Rocks form under many different types of circumstances. Some form on or very near the Earth’s surface whereas others form at many kilometres depth within the crust. For each of the five rock specimens in your Kit (i.e. specimens 2 to 6), say whether they formed on or near the surface (including underwater) or at depth, briefly giving reasons based on evidence visible in the rock. *(1 or 2 sentences for each specimen.)*

**Figure 9: Sue: part of a level 1 assignment task**

At this point in the audio-recording, Sue seems to be really engaging with writing as epistemology and as learning, even though this hardly comes up in interviews. She is concerned with the importance of moving from evidence towards conclusions, rather than with more surface features of the language, though an element of moral judgment (“short cuts” implies laziness) is still present, even if not written into feedback comments. Perhaps the fact that Geology is Sue’s academic specialism (she tells level 1 Science students in the observed tutorial, “Geology is where I feel most comfortable”) prompts this moment which combines student writing with learning and with the practice of science. To some extent, this brief glimpse of a more epistemological engagement on Sue’s part is buried in other data I ‘collected’ in her case. This illustrates the value of the in-depth approach

taken and of generating a wide range of types of data. But it also raises the question of whether Sue's epistemological approach might also be buried amongst many other messages for the student, too. After all, Sue is far from convinced that the student will even read her detailed feedback comments.

In the case of both Oxbridge-located participants, most student writing was done *before* the topic was covered in face-to-face sessions, and writing/reading and feedback were usually fresh in the mind for tutor and students (see 4.3 and Window 1: 181). These conditions had important implications for the way in which the relationship between writing and learning was understood and hence for the role of academic teacher. For example, Angela describes writing as part of a mixed learning process including reading, discussion, and feedback:

*The objective isn't for them to write really good essays ... the way it works here is the essay's only means to an end, it's not a piece of work in and of itself, so it's only the larger thing of their understanding how to be ... an anthropologist ... to me it's quite self-evident that writing would be a good tool for them to understand the material.*

Here Angela is describing a profoundly epistemological role for student writing, integrated with other forms of disciplinary practice involved in learning to be an anthropologist. Her use of the phrase "the way it works here" suggests that although a newcomer to the British system, she believes that the practices which surround student writing at OBU are not widespread in the UK or elsewhere.



### ***7.3 Holding the contradictions: hybrid discourses and practices around student writing***

In this section I explore the ways in which different discourses of writing are played out in practice through a series of exemplars intended to illustrate ways in which discourses of writing co-exist, combine and compete in the writing work of individual academic teachers, and with what consequences. We saw this mixing of discourses at work in the brief example of Sue in section 7.2.6 where an epistemological orientation was potentially buried amid a welter of more autonomous and deficit-based messages. In this section I will explore in greater depth four diverse individual examples: Martin, Paul, Mike and Angela.

#### ***7.3.1 Martin: different discourses side by side***

In his own undergraduate teaching on a year-long intercalated medical degree course at RGU, Martin tells us that his advice on writing (other than feedback on written assignments) takes the form of (oral) “nuggets of wisdom” “strewn” around while he is giving classes; his “educationalist colleague”, a nurse by training, runs classes for students which draw on the expertise of the educational support unit including a discrete “how to write session”. Although he is overall course director, Martin does not know what happens in these sessions, and clearly does not see writing in this sense as a central concern to him. Yet elsewhere in the data he does seem to see academic research writing practices as integral to the purpose of the course. He explains that

*the purpose of our writing is to start getting them used to the processes and the transferable skills they would need if they were going to be an academic health researcher, which is entirely question-driven.*

*J: so is your choice for them to formulate their own question because it's part of an induction into research practice ... if ... rather than being clinicians they end up being academics, is that the idea?*

*M: I think it's broader than that isn't it, I think to be a reflective and ... critical clinician you're perpetually asking questions and your ability to frame a question, [and] know where the evidence is to answer that question, is somewhere pretty close to the core of what one does.*

Here Martin's use of the term "transferable skills" alongside the phrase "getting them used to the processes" suggests something more akin to an apprenticeship in specific disciplinary practices than a sense of acquiring writing as a discrete and portable package of competencies that students can take with them to employment. Martin has set a written task in which students have to come up with their own question because he sees this as intrinsic to a medical way of thinking, not just to medical research but to clinical practice itself. This suggests a profoundly epistemological role for student writing: through their writing, students are learning to pose questions in medicine and as practising doctors.

In Martin's context, then, we see the co-existence of two rather contradictory discourses of writing. On one hand, it is treated as a discrete skill which can be dealt with in a separate one-off session, the content of which Martin feels no need to know or take responsibility for. On the other, it is understood as "close to the

core” of disciplinary practice, firmly within his remit as an academic teacher. The conflicting discourses and practices are able to continue alongside one another partly because of a division of labour within the course team between the “clinician” and the “educationalist”, and perhaps also because of a culture of ‘laissez faire’ between academic colleagues (see 6.4.4).

### *7.3.2 Paul: struggling to get past writing as a barrier*

A field note records a conversation over coffee with Paul and a colleague in which I hear a lot about other staff at NU2

*who were research-focused and regarded students as a nuisance and acted as though they worked at a Russell Group institution.*

Political aspects of his institutional context thus provide a dynamic background for Paul’s commentary on the issue of student writing. He feels strongly that both reading and writing currently form a “barrier” to students’ enjoyment of and effort with learning. Paul’s sense of academic writing as a barrier articulates his commitment to widening participation and justifies time spent in a context where he feels activity focused on student writing must be defended to colleagues who think differently. On the other hand, it also suggests a sequential view of writing development - Paul expects it to be less of an issue as students progress to level three. It is only when he is describing in detail in an interview some of the work he does at higher levels that it occurs to him that there is still quite a lot of writing-related work involved: it is as though ‘writing’, and even his own teaching work

around it, are invisible unless it is conceived of as a problem. Thus Paul's orientation to student writing is informed by discourses of writing as a decontextualised skill and as deficit.

Once beyond this barrier, Paul believes that students will be able to “make sense”, and that their writing will be judged on meaning as well as presentation. However, even at the third year dissertation level, he comments that the writing process is as much about demonstrating an ability to apply “academic protocol and procedure” than about “research itself”. Paul himself frequently draws on discourses of academic writing articulated in terms of surface features and academic conventions. The risk is therefore that “making sense” for Paul is confined to being presentable to examiners and employers, rather than incorporating any notion that students might want to say something meaningful through writing. In addition, he lacks confidence in his own writing expertise (e.g. see 3.6.4) and views academic writing conventions as a source of risk and even danger for students, a fear apparently partly strengthened by the priority given to such issues in his institution (see Window 3: 207). These factors combine to draw his attention away from writing as meaning-making.

A further illustration is provided by the feedback sheet adapted by Paul from colleagues (see Figure 10). The assessment grid is designed to draw a distinction between what is being summatively assessed and aspects of “format and presentation”. Visually, a content/language separation appears to be at work, while the detailed criteria given in each section are in some cases hard to differentiate. For example, “use of sources to support argument” is listed as an assessed

outcome, while “range of sources used” is given as an aspect of format. Moreover, the student receives a “satisfactory” grading for “use of sources to support argument” and a “very poor” grading for “referencing in text”. The result is potentially confusing for students, adding rather than removing barriers to their learning. In addition, because Paul has designed the assignment explicitly to focus on referencing conventions and devotes a large proportion of his feedback to it (see Window 3: 207), there is a danger that these become reified and thus appear even more impenetrable and fearsome, rather than reflecting the making, owning and validation of knowledge in the discipline. Powerful autonomous discourses of writing seem to divert Paul’s energies away from epistemological approaches. Although he devotes considerable time to “embedding” attention to student writing within his teaching, it is not embedded conceptually.

Student Name and Number \_\_\_\_\_

Assessment	Outstanding	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Very poor
<b>Summative Assessment</b>						
Understanding of central concepts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Development of logical argument	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use of sources to support argument	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ability to develop analytical account	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Format and presentation</b>						
Writing style	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Structure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grammar and spelling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Range of sources used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Referencing in text (see below)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X

**Figure 10: Paul: assessment criteria for a level 2 essay in Sports Development. See Appendix L(7)**

### 7.3.3 Mike: creative aspirations and disappointing lived realities

Of all fourteen participants in the study, Mike seems to have the most nuanced understanding of writing. Our very first interview begins with Mike asking me to clarify “which writing [I] mean”, offering three possibilities: firstly, “putting sentences together properly”; secondly “communicating academic ideas ... effectively” and finally “in a creative writing sense”. Mike’s awareness of different discourses of writing emerges in our interview discussions about specific practices and texts, for example he has taken steps on a particular third year module to stretch student writing in a creative way (see 5.3.4 and 5.4.1). However, when talking in interviews about “traditional” academic essays, his language generally foregrounds academic writing as “boring”, and conventional. This is something I raise during the second interview:

*J: When you talk about academic essays you’ve tended to talk in your interview and there [pointing to Mike’s published article] in terms of [conventional] tradition, convention [yeah] going through hoops, saying what someone wants you to say, is that how you see academic [Mike exhales loudly, smiling] writing?*

*M: getting to the heart of the matter now aren’t you ... [in the] second year essay I’ve been getting students to write for years, it’s about their reading of a certain literature around urban development and then I ask them to pick a piece of Impressionist art ... and get them to talk about how the literature ... is illustrated ... so it’s saying ... ‘[it’s] very important you know all of all these references bluh bluh bluh, cite them all properly, but then it’s about you, the other half of the marks is available for you as a creative interpretive being making sense of the painting’ ...*

*J: ... it doesn’t sound like hoop-jumping remotely because it sounds*

*Mike: the first half does ... I know what they need to cite, because I've set it all I know exactly what references they need to put in because I know what's in the library, because I've bought the books.*

With this assignment, Mike seems to be consciously drawing on two distinct discourses of academic writing, one which focuses on students' reading and citation of a particular body of "in some cases very dull" literature and another which foregrounds creativity, personal engagement and sense-making. Discussing a particular sample of this assignment in our second interview, Mike gives further explanation of his motivation behind this mixed approach:

*What I'm trying to avoid is any accusation of in order to do this [reflective and personal] stuff you have to dumb down what you do, scholarship is really important to any academic ... everybody knows that scholarship is all, otherwise we don't have an industry, we don't have a craft, but ... I guess it's a broadened definition ... scholarship includes the ability to creatively interpret the world as well as to mechanically cite what others have known about it.*

Here, a polarisation between the 'mechanical' element of scholarship and the creative interpretation of the world through writing is presented even more starkly: they are both key to success in the one assignment, but they are distinct.

Talk around text generated by Mike while marking two scripts of the same assignment (set the following year) throws up an interesting further perspective on

how these dual discourses of writing flow into practices around student writing during the course of one literacy event. A transcript of the portion recorded while Mike is marking one of the scripts, selected “at random” from the “pile”, is shown in Figure 11.

A number of things stand out in relation to Mike’s different discourses of writing evident in the transcript. His main focus is referencing – in terms of both *what* the student has cited (websites, lecture notes) and *how* (e.g. inaccurate dates and missing author names). Some surface features are also mentioned (missing capital letter, inaccurate spellings, typographical errors in dates); Mike’s interpretation of the spelling errors goes beyond the surface, however, as in one case he ‘reads’ the misspelling as an indication of possible deceit on the student’s part in “trying to pass off” that they have read a particular author, and in another as a general lack of academic reading. There are some content-related comments: the student has made some of the right “basic points”, signalled to the student in the form of ticks, but has also repeated points, and demonstrated some misunderstanding. Mike’s verdict in the feedback summary that the essay “fails to really lift off” is reflected in his own apparent feelings as he marks the work: his lack of “joy”, his dismay (“oh dear”), his exasperation at the nature of some of the inaccuracies – signalled by sighing and sarcasm (“one of the world’s earliest e-books then is it?”) and exclamations such as “oh my” and “unbelievable”.



Time* (mins: secs)	Transcript of Mike's speech; words also written down indicated in bold. See Appendix G for transcription conventions.
1:38	here we go (.) ok the first comment I'm making is actually on line one where there's a reference to Key Term which could be anybody really that they're citing, possibly Schopenhauer I suppose, but they haven't referenced the author in their citation so I'm writing ' <b>who is this a quote from</b> ' (.) big question mark
2:25	I'm correcting some grammar here (.) this is about Impressionism (.) and experience of the city and they haven't capitalised [enunciated very slowly and clearly] Impressionism
2:50	ok so the first web link comes up already now er which is to the phrase X which is clearly just lifted off a website it is cited so it's not erm poorly cited it's just not filling me with <b>joy</b> that they've just read a website
3:25	ok it's a little bit better than I'd feared (.) they got the right Bonaparte... ok that's fine
3:40	oh dear 'installs himself as Emperor in 1951' ' <b>check (.) your (.) dates</b> ' I have written (.) a hundred years out
4:07	oh dear [sighs] they're now citing an author who (.) wouldn't even have been a twinkling in his daddy's eye when in 1935 yet he'd apparently written a book (.) then (.) ' <b>Author not born then</b> ' [underlines his words?]
4:42	ok they've got the basic point about geometry (.) cleanliness (.) clean streets they get a tick for that
4:57	oh::: my:: what a good one to choose (.) now I'm getting people citing their lecture notes (.) [tuts] er ' <b>not really a source to be cited (.) use published sources</b> ' (.) quite poor practice for second years (.) you do sometimes see first years doing it (.) er just stuff they've jotted down when you've been rambling on about something and it comes back to haunt you (.) as this one just has
6:42	ok so there's some repetition here now talking again about hot water systems this is the third paragraph making the same point
7:25	ok there's a classic mistake here (.) the key character in all of these essays is Historical Figure and they've spelled [slowing down speech] his name wrong (.) which means they quite possibly have not been reading about him (.) yet trying to pass off to me that they have
8:26	stylistically it's interesting all of the (.) quotations are italicised for some strange reason (.) and they're still getting the dates wrong: 'Book' published in [enunciated very clearly] 1935 apparently (.) one of the world's earliest e-books then is ↑it
9:45	[sighs] oh dear (.) ok here there's just some misunderstanding about what the reconstruction efforts were about

10:30	and they're misspelling the word 'cited' throughout spelling it with an s (.) I realise people's spelling is (.) variable and I'm not actually deducting any marks for this erm but one thing it does demonstrate to me quite clearly (.) is that they're not reading enough because (.) if they were they would know how to spell the word cited as in 'cited in work elsewhere' they'd know how to do it and (.) they don't
11:15	and the content of the paper itself is not leading to contradiction (.) erm or contradicting my view
12:08	ok so finished reading this one now [pages turning] [exhales loudly] unbelievable (.) apparently Author wrote <b>two</b> books in 1935 (.) [pages turning]

\* Time given indicates when transcribed words started. A long pause separates each entry. No words on the recording have been omitted.

Written on the feedback sheet:

*Your essay has many of the right ingredients. However, your discussion fails to really lift off and offer a sense of evaluation, or really get to grips with the art work which you have chosen. Your use of Harvard referencing needs to be improved, especially the dates you are citing, as these are clearly wrong in many places.*

**Figure 11: Mike: transcript of audio recording and written feedback**  
**See Appendix L(10)**

This audio-recording illustrates how a discourse of academic writing as an exercise in jumping academic hoops can assert itself very quickly at a particular moment, even where an academic teacher has explicitly set up an assignment to encourage students to engage in a personal and creative way with the topic. The focus in Mike's practice and in written feedback to the (anonymous) student remains mainly on the "half" of the assessment concerned with referencing practices as an indication of the student's engagement with the literature (which at best can deliver what Mike is already looking for in terms of familiar citations) rather than on any "broadened definition of scholarship".

While this is a single example, and a 'better' script might have provoked a very different response, it is possible, in the light of other data analysis in the thesis, to understand Mike's dichotomous understanding of writing as being *either* academic *or* creative as conducive to the separation of writing and learning as practice unfolds, despite the thoughtful attempt to connect them which lies behind the task set. Behind the words of written feedback to the student lie disappointment and frustration, even a certain element of distrust that the student has engaged seriously with the assignment topic. This particular example of marking seems to reflect the negative experiences and emotions surrounding the marking of written work which have emerged in the study more broadly, and to illustrate how a notion of writing as disciplinary learning can easily be squeezed out in pedagogic interactions with students' texts.

#### *7.3.4 Angela: propitious conditions for discourses of writing as learning*

For Angela at OBU, the value of student writing is primarily as a part of learning about anthropology, rather than as a transferable skill or something which will make students employable:

*I want them to learn and a big part of that is I want them to learn how to write and I want them to learn the ideas through writing.*

She generally sees the writing that students do as a means to a study-related end and also intimately connected with reading and understanding the material they have read (see section 7.2.6). A large proportion of Angela's marginal commentary

communicates what she calls her “intellectual response” to both the assignments she brings to interview, although she also picks up on writing conventions such as referencing and the occasional need for italics (see Figure 4: 185).

Angela’s institutional context is crucial here. Staff/student ratios make it realistically possible – if not necessarily easy for Angela given her marginal position - to work in a formative way with student writing as disciplinary learning, as a matter of course. The material resources afforded in particular institutional contexts have a major bearing on the practices that can and do flow from particular discourses. However, material resources alone do not necessarily mean that epistemological approaches will take centre stage. Angela also explains to me that in some cases she has worked with students with more explicit attention to their written academic texts. For this she sees one-to-one time as essential. She points particularly to a student who has had difficulties structuring his work, whom Angela has advised to introduce a lot more signposting into his essays. However, she is frustrated as this advice (which has taken up a lot of Angela’s time – see Window 1: 181) seems to have backfired. In “working much more specifically on the writing”, she feels she has inadvertently caused a different problem in that, because the student has taken signposting on “like a mission” and now does such heavy, mechanistic “roadmapping” in his essays, his text has become more, not less confusing, repetitive and “over-written”. It is as though in making writing a more visible part of disciplinary teaching and learning, powerful autonomous discourses of writing have reasserted themselves in the student’s practice, resulting in a focus on forms while meaning is side-tracked.

## **7.4 Consequences for teachers and students**

### *7.4.1 Alienation in writing work*

As data analysis in earlier chapters and in section 7.2.2. has shown, participants seemed to frequently feel that they were going through the routine motions of higher education pedagogic practice, while far from sure about their effectiveness. Mike's 'talk around text' in the moment of engagement with a student's assessed writing (see 7.3.3 above) demonstrates the potential for boredom, even alienation in work around writing in the disciplines. A number of authors have described this condition of alienation in relation to reading and writing at university for students (e.g. Ashwin and McClean, 2005; Lillis, 2001; Mann, 2000). Mitchell suggests that such alienation is fostered by a criteria-driven, commodified approach to academic writing in which writing is

framed, not as a piece of writing in itself, nor as writing that gets something done, but as a source of information about what the [student] knows and can demonstrate (2010: 142).

Mitchell's analysis has much in common with Sarah Mann's (2008) Foucauldian analysis of assessment in higher education as an alienating practice and "technology of power" (see also Turner, 2011). Mann comments in relation to students: 'It is ... through assessment that we most vividly see the relationship between the individual and the institution and its potentially alienating effects' (2008: 114).

The findings of the present study suggest that much of what Mann contends in relation to students' experience is borne out for academic teachers too: participants' engagement with student writing was often experienced as

a task to be done, to be got out of the way ... outside the realm of the [teacher's] own control, to satisfy the demands of others rather than to fulfil the [teacher's] own purposes. [Adapted from Mann 2000: 314, writing about *students'* experience of reading "as work"].

In other words, it is not only students who are at risk of engaging in activities around student writing which have little meaning or purpose for them as individuals and which threaten to reduce them to cogs in a machine for churning out graduates.

Mann makes a useful distinction between *learning* and *study* for students, seeing study as an institutionalisation of learning and the "student" as a disciplined subjectivity in contrast to the less compromised identity of "learner". There is no simple available lexical equivalent in English to convey the distinction between "teaching-for-learning" and "teaching-for-study", nevertheless this distinction helps to make sense of some of the conflicts and compromises revealed in academic teachers' practices in this study. Participants' experiences show that it takes energy and creativity, and sometimes personal sacrifice to step outside this default framework of teaching-for-study, but that there are rewards in terms of satisfaction, pleasure and enjoyment. Occasionally, the necessary niches/spaces for writing as learning - exploration, play, intellectual development - seemed to open up for participants in this study, with varying degrees of support in their institutional context, but these easily became downgraded into something much more allied to

making sure students jump the academic hoops and feed the HE “sausage machine” (Russell).

#### *7.4.2 Marginalisation of writing work*

While student writing is understood as an ‘autonomous’ side issue – rather than being central to learning at university – the work it entails for academic teachers remains at the edges of the role, occupying a marginal area of pedagogic responsibility. As I showed in Chapter 6, many decisions about whether and how to engage in particular ways with students around writing appeared to be down to the exercise of individual discretion over where to draw the boundaries. This ‘grey area’ location for writing work can be reinforced by issues of identity and status in some contexts: while academic teachers may sometimes seek visibility for some of this work within their disciplines – as in the example of employability given in section 7.2.3 above – in other cases, participants did not want to be seen to do too much of it, for example see Dan’s case in section 6.3.5. Another example is provided by James, while describing a recent change in assessment policy in his context whereby students will be penalised for “poor” spelling and grammar:

*We’re all supposed to be coming down hard on students who regularly have poor spelling or poor grammar and to actually take marks away from people ... but there are no criteria (.) so how harsh should one be is up to the individual and a lot of people might be quietly forgiving of spelling errors.*

The use of the term “quietly” here suggests a certain covert element of practice: academic teachers may have to manage the competing needs of the broader collective and the individual or smaller group without drawing too much attention to the inconsistencies which might result (see 6.4.3). This situation is both reinforced by and in turn sustains an understanding of writing work as separate from disciplinary pedagogy.

One consequence of this situation for teachers is that such work is subject to informal mechanisms in which power and status shape the distribution of workload in a relatively untrammelled way. For example, Robert explains that where students do seek face-to-face advice from disciplinary colleagues on their writing:

*If you're available as a member of staff with an open door quite often you end up being the person who fields these enquiries and perhaps other colleagues don't even realise that that's happening, I'm sure they're quite happy for colleagues who do it to continue do it.*

There is a hint here that he feels that such ‘drop-in’ work is to some extent hidden, perhaps conveniently so for some, since it is frequently viewed as both time-consuming and lacking in prestige. In a different example, although English is Emma’s second language, she takes responsibility for helping third/fourth year students with the “language” side of things, because her (‘native-speaker’) colleague



*says his English is appalling ... so he lets me do the language correction which I find bizarre because I'm not the English speaker.*

I note in a field diary that the same colleague explains frankly to me that Emma is the one who “actually cares” whether students have understood her lectures. On another module, students come to Emma as personal tutor for support on a written assignment, rather than ask the colleague who sets it. One reading of these situations (not necessarily Emma’s) is that she is doing a disproportionate amount of the language work, partly because when students seek guidance outside limited written advice, this is seen as ‘personal’ help best sought from a ‘caring’, female lecturer. Another interpretation is that writing work, like other less favoured tasks in higher education, is being unevenly distributed partly because of omission or even “learned incompetence” by others, in this case on the part of a male/‘native speaker’ colleague (Worthington and Hodgson, 2005).

These examples suggest that disciplinary writing work might be described as operating in an informal or ‘grey’ economy at the rather blurred boundaries between what is and is not considered to be part of the job. Butterwick and Dawson use Ilich’s term “shadow work” to describe “the work you need to do to get the job done, that doesn’t get considered as a part of the job ... and ... hardly earns you a notch on your CV” (2005: 61). Like other “shadow work” in HE which takes place in the institutional penumbra, work around writing done by participants in this study was liable to be unevenly and perhaps unfairly distributed, subject to local negotiations and to power relationships between individuals in academic contexts (Butterwick and Dawson 2005; Worthington and Hodgson, 2005) perhaps

along lines of gender, seniority or language background, or at the expense of the conscientious teacher, while others focus on high profile activities such as research. The tendency to class writing-related work as care or personal support, explored above in relation to Emma and in section 7.2.5, reinforces these uneven consequences further along gendered lines. This has been foregrounded by feminist researchers in HE who have argued that “emotional labour” is unevenly distributed in academia (Butterwick and Dawson, 2005; Hey, 2001; Acker and Feuerwerker, 1996; Blackmore, 1996).

At the end of section 6.4.3 we saw that academic teachers’ work afforded some advantages of flexibility and autonomy in decisions about what and how much to do with particular student writers. But there were also difficulties as well as benefits in operating at the uncertain margins, especially where students’ perceptions of their entitlement might be inflated by institutional marketing, or at least greater than the teacher’s (see also 5.5.3). Angela describes a dilemma created for her when a student takes her up very seriously on an offer to help with written work before it is submitted:

*A: one student in particular really wants a lot of feedback, which is great in the sense of he’s being very conscientious ... **this isn’t really my job** ... I don’t mind doing it when I can, but just at the moment I’m really heavily collared for time so*

*J: yes that’s quite interesting isn’t it, **so there’s a sort of blurred boundary there, isn’t there**, because the student may think that’s part of the service*

*A: right, yeah, no I think the distinction won’t be clear to them ... **it’s sort of a sort of deeper structural thing** and it’s also possibly my fault for not managing their*

*expectations accordingly ... they're always [saying] 'oh really sorry to pester you' [my emphasis]*

Here, expectations of work around student writing are only partly articulated in employment contracts, so this work is 'invisible' to the institution and not considered by Angela to be "really [her] job"; on the other hand, it may be part of students' expectations, creating a situation where if someone does not "go above and beyond", to use Angela's words, they fear they may be perceived as letting students down. Students also feel they have to 'tip toe' – so both teacher and students seem to be feeling their way towards what is acceptable, with little institutional guidance. Angela has to manage expectations partly set up elsewhere, but not built in at a "deeper structural" level to the working set-up. She explains she respects that "[students]'re trying to get every inch out of [their experience at OBU]" but that this "doesn't mean it's always easy for me to manage it, as the service provider, if you like". This recalls the sense of a gap between student expectations and teachers' practices, arising in part out of marketised relations in universities, explored in section 5.5. Moreover, Angela is working in a context where, as a more approachable, younger and female graduate student teacher, she may be the obvious first port of call for students who want help in developing their academic writing.

In Chapter 6 I showed that from the teacher perspective, work with students and with their texts aimed at developing academic writing has to be resourced in a variety of ways – materially, for example in terms of time, space, and effort, and symbolically, through understandings of what is valuable and worthwhile, and

through positive identities that are invoked by particular practices. Thus practice around student writing in the disciplines could be viewed as being enacted within a specific sub-section of a broader “general economy of symbols and status” (Blommaert, 2005: 61) in UK HE. In this view, much work around student writing exists at the penumbral boundary between formal and informal sectors – particular forms of work are valued and so resourced at institutional level, other practices may depend on the personal values of individuals or smaller groups of colleagues, and thus have to be resourced materially from more informal sources, at the margins of the job, particularly in terms of time, space and energy. As we saw in Chapters 4 and 6, the contradictions between professional pedagogies and low staff/student ratios can be reconciled at institutional level by rendering such work effectively invisible: the work is ‘outsourced’, if not to the “ivory ghetto” (Swales, 1990) of discrete language provision (for example, Auntie Floss and colleagues, see 6.3.8), to the margins of academics’ own working lives, and its lived realities denied in structural terms.

Sometimes, as a means of resolving competing pressures of heavy demands and scarce resources, where this was an option, participants in this study drew on the labour of others in their disciplines who were even more marginal to the institution, in a manner which I argue is also analogous to ‘outsourcing’. For example, Dan (RGU) talks to me about a tutorial system in which smaller groups of six to seven students are assisted with their studies by academic staff; this is where work on academic writing is explicitly written into the curriculum (see 7.2.5). Close inspection of the schedule for these sessions indicates that approximately half of these are in fact run by postgraduate students, who are responsible for covering topics such as “essay-writing”, “reference lists” and “plagiarism” and for marking

the bulk of tutorial assignments.<sup>35</sup> Tom (OBU) expresses a strong view that because of increasing pressure to publish, more and more tutorial work will be done by postgraduate students. Angela, working in the same institution in a different disciplinary and collegial location, and who tells me she “can’t think of anyone more marginal” to the university than herself, is one such graduate teacher.

In some ways these contexts appear to reflect trends elsewhere in the delivery of writing development in the UK HE system; for example, the successful Writing and Learning Mentor Programme at University College London is based on a largely voluntary scheme where postgraduate students mentor others in similar disciplines in return for training, valuable experience and a “stipend” (Creme and McKenna, 2010). This scheme could be regarded as a creative form of “outsourcing” of disciplinary writing work to the informal sector, as a means to ensure that attention to writing is maintained within disciplines despite the usual academic staffing constraints. Writing mentors in this scheme, who were themselves “at a point in their career when they may be struggling to find a place in their field and the academy” (*ibid.*: 154) reported huge benefits in terms of their own academic and writing development. Other, less creative forms of outsourcing are not unknown: for example, an online Education magazine in the US, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, reported in April 2010 that a professor at the university of Houston had outsourced “grading” and feedback of undergraduate assessments in

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<sup>35</sup> Students in Dan’s institution wrote to senior management in 2006 to complain that essays were being marked by fellow undergraduates.

business law and ethics to Bangalore, through a private company (<http://chronicle.com/article/Outsourced-Grading-With/64954>). The attraction of this type of “outsourcing” of labour around student writing is predicated on a notion of writing as skills which can be “efficiently” “delivered” outside disciplinary pedagogic interaction, and which fundamentally belies the complex nature of writing and of learning to write in academic ways.

I am not contending here that disciplinary writing work at university, as reflected in this study, is equivalent to low-paid piece work, such as that frequently found in the global knowledge economy as exemplified above. Nevertheless, as Chapter 6 illustrated, academic teachers in this study often felt that low value was placed on such work by students, colleagues and managers. I argue that data gathered for this study provide some evidence that the ‘Cinderella’ status for language work, powerfully demonstrated by Turner in the context of language specialist domains such as EAP (2011, 2004; see also Orr and Blythman, 2006), and echoed in this study in the figure of “Auntie Floss” (see 6.3.5) applies equally to discipline-based writing work, and that this both drives and is driven by a conceptual separation between writing and disciplinary learning and knowledge-making, in a spiral which threatens the role of writing as a meaningful mode of disciplinary communication at undergraduate level.

## ***7.5 Unfulfilled desires for hospitable spaces for disciplinary writing work***

The previous section focuses mainly on negative consequences for academic teachers and students working in university contexts where autonomous discourses of writing hold sway. Nevertheless, academic teachers in the study had a strong vision of something better, a sense that it was possible to approach student writing in ways which were more satisfying for them as teachers, which made more of a positive difference in students' own terms and which were defined as teaching and learning *in the subject*. As I have shown, sometimes they were enabled to enact aspects of these visions in their practice by drawing on and configuring the material and discursive resources of their contexts, often at the margins when departures from routine proved possible; sometimes these visions remained as aspirations. I have described the efforts of academic teachers in the study to enable something better to happen around student writing as "carving out spaces" for productive work (see 6.6). In this section I will look in greater depth at what these real and imaginary spaces look like for academic teachers, particularly in terms of the social relations which characterise them, and also explore the ways in which the lived experience falls short of the ideal. I will look first at relationships with students, and then at relationships with colleagues and institutions.

### ***7.5.1 Student/teacher relations***

Data analysis has shown that a range of factors such as large student numbers, anonymised assessment (5.3.4), and institutional surveillance of interactions around writing e.g. of written feedback (5.5.4 and Window 2: 195) meant that this activity was often associated with a sense of disengagement with individual

students and their texts (echoed in the findings of Crook *et al.*, 2006). Several participants referred to the pressure of ratios and their impact on the “individual rapport” (Mike) with students. Their experiences resonate with Mitchell’s account of academic writing in a contemporary institutional context as a form of “mass production”, to some extent drained of meaning for students and their teachers: “commodified, technologized as a product and homogenized as a process” (2010: 134). For example, Deborah explains that when asked about her views on anonymous assessment *before* it was introduced across her institution, she used to joke “it’s working fine”: because she was marking large numbers of scripts, she had “absolutely no idea who these students are”. The conditions of mass education, particularly in the form of low staff-student ratios, also seemed to put pressure on the work around writing done in face-to-face circumstances. Mike describes a first-year module he taught which included a session on essay-writing:

*M: ... it wasn't one to one, it was done in that big lecture theatre over there in fact on the ground floor*

*J: right yes I can see all those tiered seats, yes*

*M: so we didn't have any individual rapport ... with the numbers of students in that class being eighty or something it was very difficult to work with any real sense that students were making progress ... for an institution that markets itself as small friendly and personal it didn't seem to fit well with our philosophy, so we ditched it*

As described in section 7.2.6 above, attention to writing in Mike’s context has now become part of the institution’s Personal Development Planning system: the 1:80



work “ditched” above has been relocated in a one-to-one support space, more human in scale, but of a quasi-disciplinary nature.

Analysis in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 has shown that there are pockets of work where engagement on a more personal scale around student writing proves possible, and seems to re-energise the relationships between academic teachers and students, moving them towards a joint sense of purpose. One of the key motivations for undertaking such work – despite constraints and disincentives – seems to be participants’ desire to see their impact as teachers on individual students, their enjoyment of “the interaction that comes with it” (Emma) and their commitment to students as people and learners. Deborah’s “wonderful satisfaction” in seeing her students work out what she means when they are going through a marked assignment 1-1 with her echoes this (see 4.6.4), as does Angela’s comment that the students are like “kids with candy” when they first receive feedback on their written work for her. Martin nostalgically recalls the feedback from his undergraduate supervisor at Oxbridge, a “beautiful Frenchwoman”

*who would do voluminous micro-writing scripted comments, which I found extraordinarily stimulating, after you’d poured heart your heart and soul into something for a week, and this detailed feedback was wonderful.*

This hints at an intense emotional satisfaction to be gained from such encounters, even though Martin’s meetings with his students around their writing seem to be altogether more “painful” and fraught (see 5.5.4). I also showed in sections 5.3.3

and 5.3.4 that opportunities for two-way discussion – sometimes described as “handholding” (Deborah, Pam) – enabled students and teachers to take risks with academic writing which had potential rewards in terms of learning, engagement and stimulation. Participants seemed to be clear about their desire for work around writing on a ‘human’ rather than on an “industrialized” (Mitchell, 2010: abstract) scale, though also often conscious that this desire was not always realisable.

Metaphors of “handholding” recall findings in sections 6.3.5 and 7.4.2 where work around student writing was seen in some cases to be bound up with gendered aspects of participants’ identity. Attention to writing was sometimes associated rather negatively in the study with “mummying” or “babying” students, spoonfeeding or even nappy changing, metaphors which downgrade it and convey it as being outside the academic teacher’s remit. However, understanding disciplinary writing work as care did not always signal its rejection: at times some participants asserted “care” in their work with student writing as valuable and worthwhile. For example, Angela reports a conversation with a French postgraduate colleague. When she shared with him her concerns about an undergraduate who was not turning his essays in, Angela reports his response thus *[in strong ‘French’ accent]*:

*In France ... the weaklings just fall to the side ... don't wipe their bottoms for them, they're not babies you know.*

Angela's telling of this story in an interview suggests that she at least partly rejects the suggestion that caring about a students' written work is or should be regarded as a low value – even distastefully inappropriate – activity.

Deborah also appears to associate some of the hard work around student writing – in particular the “constant stream of students” at her door with queries prior to essay deadlines – with caring:

*We do it because as a department our ethos is very much that ... we care passionately about our students and we care passionately about our research and as a result we're all exhausted and I don't know how much longer it can go on.*

Here Deborah appears to be asserting “care” as an academic value, and raising caring for and about students to the same level as caring about one's research (see also 4.6.1). Her stance seems to echo that of Clegg (2008, 2010), Lynch (2009), Butterwick and Dawson (2005), and others who call for a re-evaluation of caring as integral to academic work and identity. What is clear, however, is that these different forms of caring represent *conflicting* demands of time and energy for Deborah: both forms of passion/caring are worth striving for and yet they pull her in different directions, resulting in exhaustion and perhaps even burn-out. In a different way, we saw in section 6.3.5 that gendered metaphors associating work around student writing with a mother/child relationship signalled a similar conflict in the context of low staff/student ratios where the ‘children’/students are many, not few, and their needs threaten to overwhelm the caring academic teacher; although Pam thinks of herself as “caring” she also allows the “bossy” side of her to take

over, because “you can’t keep spoon feeding people” and because her patience runs out.

Metaphors of handholding and of students as children suggest an element of safety and protection in the pedagogic relationship. Notions of academic writing as potentially risky in the context of assessment, and the academic teacher’s role as one of protector, were explored in section 5.4. Protection can, however, take different forms. Students can be discouraged from straying into risky territory altogether (as expressed by James’ “tethers and safety lines”). Conversely, they can be enabled to *take* productive risks which are managed through opportunities for dialogue (as in Angela’s tutorial where she sets a challenging reading or in Paul’s support for students producing a report for an external organisation), by providing relatively safe spaces (for example, Deborah’s writing workshops, see 6.2.1), and by reducing the ‘stakes’, for example by reducing the weighting of earlier assessments, a strategy adopted by a number of participants. Students can do more with writing if they know, in Emma’s words, “they are not alone in this”.

As I showed in section 6.2.3, those elements of practice around writing which seemed to be both more effective and more satisfying for participants were often accompanied by a sense of mutual give and take with students within the discipline or for some, as teachers. For example, Angela communicates her enjoyment of reading students’ work – to one she writes: “it has been a pleasure to read your contributions over the course of the term.” The word contribution here itself indicates a sense of real value brought by the student. Emma and her colleague express similar pleasure to students working on a “proper scientific

paper” (see 6.2.3). Deborah describes her experience of marking an assignment where students all do different topics:

*I’m always interested in reading what they have to say and I enjoy it if they’ve done it well.*

Another characteristic of the pedagogic relations which emerged as being the most productive from participants’ perspectives, closely related to the notion of mutual exchange and learning, is that of reduced hierarchies. This was an important element of Emma’s practice (see 4.2.4) on the third/fourth year module she believed to be extremely successful. It was also an important dimension of Paul’s vision of his work as an academic teacher and to some extent to Pam’s (6.3.2). Angela explains that although she sometimes lacks a sense of authority in her teaching, thinking “who am I to mark their essays?”, the reduced distance has its benefits:

*As much as I don’t know my stuff as well as some of the lecturers do ... I’m a lot more interested in teaching [students] and that I think probably makes a pretty big difference in their education.*

### *7.5.2 Collegial and institutional relations*

As shown in section 6.4, although some participants experienced their autonomy as being limited, individual participants seemed to frequently instantiate a culture of academic autonomy in their decisions about work round student writing. As Ball

(2003) suggests is the case with other aspects of academic work, despite the pressures of the “new managerialism”, there seemed to be sufficient spaces for the academic teachers in this study to find some agency in one or other aspect of their practice around student writing, ranging from the introduction of a radically new assignment, to something as mundane as participants’ choice of writing colour for feedback. In section 6.4.6 I briefly referred to the sense of resistance of some participants in response to institution-wide initiatives around writing. Deborah (P92U) tells a story which provides a vivid illustration of her sense that her institution has ridden roughshod over her and colleagues’ professional decisions as academic teachers about how to address student writing:

*The university introduced something called its [graduate skills development programme] which in effect meant do what we were already doing, but because we have an idiotic management they didn’t come and say ‘well what are you already doing?’, they said ‘you have to do this, that we have designed in a completely different context for people teaching technical subjects and science, and now you have to do it in History.’*

Deborah’s resentment of imposed institutional agendas, poorly tailored to her discipline, is clear here. Her use of personal pronouns, particularly “they”, along with phrases such as “idiotic management”, signals her sense of distance from policy-making at supra-disciplinary levels in the institution. A similar sense of resentment of more centralised agendas emerged in analysis of Russell’s case (e.g. see Window 2: 195), as well as in data from Pam and Sue (all three based in DLU), but also in Emma’s disappointment in the way in which disciplinary

conversations have been replaced at RGU by the university-wide “teaching and learning programme” (see 4.2.4) and in Robert’s dislike of administrative control over module titles at P92U (6.4.1).

Nevertheless, data analysis (see 6.4) suggests that it is important not to romanticise the notion of academic autonomy where it comes to work with student writing. Autonomy is compromised in a context where there is too much work to do in the time available. It can also sometimes be a euphemism for isolation and for a form of self-reliance in which responsibility and risk shifts from employers to workers, to those in more marginal positions, or to students as ‘independent learners’, or for a working culture in which there is a reluctance to challenge each other to change practices around student writing. What participants in this study did seem to desire, and sometimes achieved (see 6.4.5), were local spaces where productive conversations and exchanges with colleagues could take place, with specific disciplinary and teaching contexts in mind.

### *7.5.3 Hospitable spaces for writing work*

Brought together, these desires form a vision of ‘hospitable’ spaces which provide favourable conditions for meaningful work around student writing within the disciplines. The hospitable spaces for writing work envisaged by participants in this study are primarily characterised by certain sorts of social relations: pedagogic relations which are caring but with an element of mutual exchange, respect and dialogue, and with less asymmetry than is normally the case between academic teachers and their students. They provide a degree of shelter from the institutional glare of quality assurance and other forms of centralised accountability and control

for teachers, and where possible from the high stakes of formal assessment for students. They are therefore safe enough to enable exploration, play and challenge to flourish and even risks to be taken with writing. Hospitality is not just about relationships and 'space', however; it also suggests material comforts and the ample provision of the resources needed for meaningful activity - ideally not supplied at the margins of the institution, in an *ad hoc*, unsustainable or semi-voluntary fashion - but in a planned and properly funded way. If the disciplines are to provide such hospitable spaces for writing work, in which both students and teachers feel they have an investment, writing must be seen as central to the disciplinary endeavour: the disciplines need to be recognised as the 'home' of writing.

## **7.6 Concluding comments**

In this chapter I have argued that dominant, autonomous and transparent discourses of language, especially of academic writing – at both individual and institutional levels – play a key role in frustrating attempts to integrate student writing and writing work with disciplinary learning and teaching. Individual academic teachers' own disciplinary engagement gives them access to an integrated understanding of the role of reading and writing in knowledge-making and learning, but in the complex lived realities of everyday practice, this integration is frequently buried, sidelined, stifled or confused by the presence of other, powerful discourses which tend to drive writing and learning apart. The discussion in this chapter has focused on discourses and practices rather than types of text, and the spaces in which particular practices can flourish. Sometimes, new academic written genres contribute to the opening up of such spaces (for example,



Mike's guided learning log). However, data analysis in this study suggests that quite 'traditional' academic writing genres – such as the 2,000-word essays set by Angela or Emma's "proper scientific paper" - need not be stultifying, boring, drained of meaning; the potential for transformative work with students is in the pedagogic practices which surround the production of students' texts as much as in the genres students are asked to use. On the other hand, potentially transformative processes themselves, such as opportunities for dialogue around writing, can still remain separate from disciplinary learning where the discourses in circulation point powerfully the other way, as in Paul's case.

Glimmers of practice where writing and learning were combined both for academic teacher and potentially their students emerged in many cases against a far duller background, in which large student numbers, an element of predictability and a mutual defensiveness seemed to combine to produce an association for participants between disciplinary writing work and boredom, alienation and disengagement – and a strong feeling that neither 'academic' nor 'pedagogic' purposes were being served. In many cases, a desire emerged amongst participants for more satisfying and transformative work around student writing, which could offer the pleasures of "engaging with writing in ways that are meaningful at local level" (Mitchell, 2010: 146) for academic teachers and their students. However, these approaches came at a cost (in terms of time and recognition, for example) often met by individual academic teachers, rather than through value attributed in the broader institutional system. Carving out hospitable spaces in which to make a positive difference therefore required imagination, planning, negotiation, sometimes risks and extra effort. These findings suggest that work around student writing needs to be understood as having legitimate

potential for play, enjoyment, pleasure, exploration and personal meaning *for teachers*: to be central to academic teachers' "concerns and passions" (*ibid.*: 147). At the same time, data analysis also provides a clear indication that the institutional context is important in throwing its weight behind some discourses more heavily than others – not just through the circulation of centrally sourced givens and values, but also in the form of regulatory systems, assessment regimes, and through the distribution of resources: institutional conditions and priorities can provide support, or hinder, attempts to bring writing, learning and meaning-making together.

These findings take the argument back to the research questions set out in section 3.2. They address empirical and theoretical questions about the practices of academic teachers around student writing, and about how these practices reflect institutional contexts, issues of power and identity and understandings of writing in the academy. They also have implications for those engaged in developing student writing, whether academic teachers themselves, writing developers, academic developers or researchers. In the following chapter I will conclude my discussion, summarising findings presented in the thesis, and explaining their significance in relation to the research questions, including the implications for practice and for further research. I will also evaluate the study on which the thesis is based and its representation here, again with a view to making warrantable sense of my findings and consolidating the claims which I have made.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

### ***8.1 Introduction***

In this concluding chapter I set out key ways in which this thesis has added to our understanding of academic teachers' practices around student writing in UK Higher Education, and evaluate its contribution to the fields of academic literacies and higher education studies. I begin in section 8.2 with a summary of key findings and their significance in relation to the first three research questions (see 3.2), setting out how these findings sit with and contribute to existing research. The first research question sought to explore what academic teachers in the disciplines do around student writing, seen from their perspectives and taking into account their institutional contexts; the second explored what these practices mean to and for them in their institutional contexts in terms of visibility, status and identity; the third, how these practices reflect particular discourses of writing and writing work in the academy and thus intersect with broader questions of the nature and purpose of contemporary HE. A key contribution of this thesis is to show that, in the lived experience of academic teachers, these issues are inextricably connected. Therefore in the following discussion, I summarise findings in relation to these three questions together.

In section 8.3 I go on to address the fourth research question which concerns the implications of these findings for HE practitioners: language specialists, writing developers, academic developers and their institutions, as well as for academic teachers themselves. Moving to section 8.4, I offer a critique of the study on which the thesis is based, focusing on its methodological successes, but also on what could have been done to enhance its strength and scope. This leads to section 8.5

and a discussion of further research needed, and to some more general implications of this thesis for research in the field of academic literacies. Finally, in section 8.6 I provide some personal concluding comments, closing with a view of the progress I have made in terms of the learning journey which began as described in the introductory chapter.

## **8.2 Key findings**

### *8.2.1 Institutional context and individual agency*

One key finding of the study is that institutional contexts play a major role in shaping academic teachers' practices. This was particularly evident, for example, in differences between the Oxbridge contexts of Tom and Angela and other institutional contexts in the study. These differences were reflected in broad patterns in individuals' practice, for example in decisions about when students do writing in relation to face-to-face tuition on a topic, but also inscribed in textual details, for example in the form of feedback comments, as shown in the "snips" of feedback in Chapter 4, and in examples of official paperwork surrounding assessment (or its absence in some contexts). There were other examples in the data in which institutional context in the form of particular assessment regimes appeared to impinge heavily on the practices of individuals, for example, procedures around anonymity in assessment – widely different in different contexts – had a significant bearing on participants' experiences of and approaches to student writing. Other institutional differences are hinted at in the study, for example, both Diane and Paul appeared to share a strong focus on referencing and plagiarism which was a dominant issue at institutional level at NU2, though Diane's practice in this respect appeared to be more aligned to

institutional policy than Paul's. These institutional influences have been noted in other empirical research where official procedures and paperwork around assessment led to an emphasis in teacher feedback on "conformity and uniformity" even where this left teachers feeling frustrated and ineffectual (Bailey and Garner, 2010: 195-6). In section 8.5 I consider what further research might be undertaken to follow up some of the interesting possibilities raised, for example through studies which seek to draw institutional comparisons.

A complementary finding, generated through the approach taken in the study represented here, is that although from a student's point of view, a teacher may represent the institution and the academic world generally, from the teacher's perspective the relationship between individual pedagogical choices and institutional practices is more complex. For many, if not all, the participants in this study, there was a degree of slippage between institutional policies and their own interpretations of their responsibilities towards student writers. Sometimes this was felt to be the result of limited time or other resources to work with student writing. At other times, an individual's departure from centrally endorsed practice seemed to be a consciously and carefully managed pedagogical choice carved out against a background of different costs and benefits. This emphasis of an individual's possibilities for agency within specific institutional structures is clearly summed up in Emma's words:

*Although there are all kinds of committees which try to make all kinds of things consistent, it still boils down to how an individual lecturer delivers an individual unit*

*and you can write as many policies and regulations as you want, what happens in the classroom is entirely down to that person.*

Conversely, participants often expressed resentment at what they saw as the imposition of practices and procedures from the centre (see 7.5.2). Different participants charted different courses between conformity and resistance to institutional policies and institutionally valued practices around student writing – but few were unaware that these tensions and gaps existed.

In addition, many aspects of practice around student writing remained “unlegislated and undocumented” (Crook *et al.*, 2006), where no clear policy existed or was monitored, occupying a penumbral area which academic teachers in the disciplines had no choice but to negotiate their own boundaries between what was and was not their responsibility and how it should be discharged. Negotiations in these ‘grey areas’ (see 7.4.2) were shot through with issues of power amongst teachers as well as in relation to students, resulting in uneven distributions of workload. Practices were often explicitly contested amongst colleagues: participants often appeared to consciously align themselves with one side or other of debates within their contexts about how best to tackle student writing and whose job it was to do so (for example, in Paul’s institution where there is “awareness of different views”, see section 7.3.2, or in Martin’s disagreements with the “educationalist” about whether to write on students’ scripts, see 6.4.4). Thus, every action in connection with student writing was also an act of positioning, in relation to competing, locally circulating discourses of teaching and learning, of writing and writing work, and of higher education.

### 8.2.2 Pedagogy as social practice and as work

Through the development of ethnographic case studies this study provides a view of work around writing in the disciplines which does justice to the complexity of individuals' practice and its situatedness in particular, shifting and multilayered contexts. Exploring multiple sources of data from a number of starting points has thrown up empirical insights which contribute to existing understandings of academic teachers' practices around student writing in the disciplines, including those which have remained relatively hidden from view both institutionally and in research terms. From this position, pedagogic practices around students' academic literacies are opened up as *social practice*, and seen to be entangled with contested questions of identity, status, epistemology and social relations, continually negotiated through practice and discourse. The study therefore addresses the challenge thrown down by other HE researchers (see 2.5.1) to develop an understanding of HE practice which does not isolate teaching and learning from the broader social, cultural, political and economic structures of the sector. Academic literacies work has made a major contribution in this respect in relation to students' learning; the current study addresses this challenge specifically in relation to teaching.

This study has also thrown light on the ways in which academic teachers' practice does not only vary from one person to another (for example, as a consequence of their different disciplinary locations, institutional roles, personal history and values etc.) but also on how it varies *within* the pedagogical repertoire of an individual. Most participants in this study voiced their awareness of this variation, for example in terms of what they felt was their 'good' and 'bad', or 'innovative' versus 'routine'

practice. These variations emerged in the analysis of multiple sources of data alongside interviews, enabling insights to be drawn from particular interactions and practices relating to particular texts. The study therefore clearly illustrates the importance of not associating individual teachers simplistically with particular approaches to teaching, or even of regarding them as being at a single point on a personal “continuum in their professional development” (Ivanič *et al.*, 2007), as has been argued in relation to student learning (Haggis, 2003). Rather, at any one moment, individuals are balancing a number of factors, and are negotiating their position discursively, aware (to differing degrees) of the symbolic (in Bourdieu’s sense, see 2.2.3) as well as the material costs and benefits in situations where some discourses have greater currency, reach and power than others. For example, decisions about how to approach student writing were frequently bound up with individuals’ calculation of the costs to their professional identity in an environment where teaching and research were often understood as being in competition with one another. Depending on institutional priorities, this often resulted in a range of compromises which might mean that an academic teacher’s responsibility for student writing was allowed to come to the fore in some contexts but not others. These are significant findings for those (e.g. writing specialists, academic developers) who wish to engage with disciplinary teaching staff to support them to develop their practice, making clear the role of real institutional structures and discourses. They point to the inadequacy of an approach which locates problems solely within individuals or their “complexes” (Clughen and Connell, 2012) around writing work.

This approach also enables the emergence of a perspective of academic teachers’ practices around student writing as *work*, arguably essential in order to translate



insights into academic literacies into action in the form of transformative pedagogies. A key example of this is the emergence in the study of an empirical understanding of the lived experience of feedback-*giving* – and so of *marking* - as a social practice; a perspective rarely seen in published work to date<sup>36</sup>. The lenses of “social practice” and “work” combine in this study to provide a framework for understanding academic literacies as taking place in a mixed material and symbolic economy, in which capital circulates in a range of forms – material, human, social, linguistic, cultural. So, key to understanding practice around student writing is an understanding of the resources which are involved – work, effort, time, space, investment. Transformational pedagogies – and so transformative experiences for students – do not ‘grow on trees’ but must be resourced and sustained within this complex discursive and material economy. Institutional contexts differ in the degree to which they nurture and sustain the work involved, or leave it to individuals to find the energy required to make a positive difference.

### *8.2.3 Hospitable spaces for discipline-based writing work*

A further general finding of the study is that in many ways, practice around student writing was often experienced rather negatively. Problems of marginality, lack of recognition and status, lack of time and resources, precariousness and instability of provision, along with an alienating sense of dullness, of wasted effort and of failure to get through to students: all of these in different ways played a part in the experiences of participants. This finding is consistent with a large body of research

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<sup>36</sup> See, however, Tuck (2012)

literature which documents continuing dissatisfaction on the part of teachers as well as their students, especially in the area of assessment and feedback, with which writing is closely associated (see 2.3.3). In this study, however, a much more positive side to participants' lived experiences of their work with student writers also emerged, even if this was often reserved for particular 'niches' of their everyday working lives as academic teachers. Most had a story to tell about parts of their practice which were more satisfying, effective and enjoyable for them and, it would seem, for students.

These better moments were characterised by opportunities for face-to-face interaction with students around writing, with dialogue, with learning from one another, and with a sense of collegial collaboration. These positive experiences are also reflected in the outcomes of other published accounts of academic teachers' practice around writing in the disciplines (e.g. Lillis *et al.*, forthcoming; Ahearn, 2006; Lillis, 2006). The methodological approach taken in this study, which allows for a shifting and multiple understanding of identity, shows that academic teachers are sometimes able to reduce the sense of separation and hierarchy between them and their students in interactions around writing; they are not powerless to reduce their power, at least on a temporary basis, and this need not necessarily be an exercise in merely disguising asymmetry (see 2.2.3). This study makes a useful further contribution in that, through its focus on the lived experience of teachers themselves, it highlights that in the context of academic teachers' everyday working lives, the hospitable spaces in which such 'good' practice can unfold do not just 'happen'. They often have to be actively carved out against the grain: worked, bargained, even sacrificed for. It was sometimes possible to step outside taken-for-granted routine practices, but this always

entailed a cost – often borne by individuals not through institutional forms of support or recognition.

#### *8.2.4 Costs, rewards and investment in disciplinary writing work*

It is therefore unsurprising to also have found that these ‘carved out’ spaces occurred where individual academic teachers had a strong sense of personal investment in moving beyond the dull routines surrounding student academic writing. This investment might be intellectual – such as the opportunity to learn something new from students; affective – for example, the satisfaction of seeing students learn; moral - connected with deeply held commitments and values; pragmatic - for example a matter of time-saving; or reputational – for example where student writing was at the centre of dealings with external organisations. Few, if any, participants felt that in their contexts, meaningful work around student writing (for students and teachers) in the disciplines was recognised in other ways, through status or payment. However, for some based in institutional and departmental environments where teaching was explicitly valued, there seemed to be some opportunities to actively ‘capitalise’ on – to generate value for themselves through - such work. The contextual view offered in this study enables us to see these personal investments not simplistically or judgmentally as “teacher-centred”, but as something writing developers can work with when they attempt to engage academic teachers in developing their practice, and to understand the importance of promoting the rewards (even the occasional strategic rewards) as well as responsibilities of work with student writing.

### *8.2.5 Discourses of writing and writing work in the academy*

Academic teachers' bargaining, negotiations and positioning in relation to practice around student writing, as the above discussion makes clear, take place in wider institutional contexts, and also within the macro-level socio-economic, political and discursive context of UK HE more broadly. Every instantiation of practice is shaped by, contributes to or resists dominant discourses of writing, writing work and of higher education, allowing different degrees of space for alternative discourses and practices. There are two main linked discourses surrounding student writing in HE which emerged as significant for the practices of academic teachers in this study. First of all, long-established understandings of language as transparent, separate from content, and visible only where there is a problem, still dominate, shaping practice at the 'textface' in specific moments and contexts. This is linked in some cases with particular orientations to writing work: individual academic teachers' sense that student writing does not really have anything to do with them, that it is separate from disciplinary content and so dull, or that they lack the relevant expertise, or a mixture of all of these. Secondly, the association of writing with assessment keys it into some increasingly powerful contemporary tropes associated with changes in the socio-economic relations between students and academic staff in HE: tropes of fairness, transparency and accountability. Not only does the transparent and 'objective' view of academic language have myriad roots in Western intellectual traditions which help it to hold fast, but its dominance is compounded by contemporary changes in an increasingly marketised higher education. Discourses of accountability and fairness, underpinned by notions of 'transparency' in public life, join forces with the transparent and objective view of academic language which thus reasserts itself with relative ease within the practices and preoccupations of individual academic teachers.

As a result, some may eschew responsibility for student writing altogether, but even those, like many in this study, who have found from experience that ‘discrete’ treatment of and provision for student writing is ineffective, may be seduced by models of ‘embeddedness’ which retain the conceptual distinction between language and thinking, between writing and the discipline. Thus, they may well be paying attention to student writing ‘within’ their disciplinary teaching, but this attention is often co-opted by influential discourses such as study skills, employability and personal development. Consequently, timetabling and resourcing decisions annex (and arguably downgrade) writing even when provided under the disciplinary umbrella. This does nothing to reverse a cycle of ineffectiveness leading to disillusion, even to a form of despair, captured in Deborah’s memorable image of the king Sisyphus, condemned eternally to roll a stone up a hill.

Student writing in this context all too easily becomes something to avoid where possible, either by passing it on like a hot potato to someone else outside the discipline, or by leaving it to the more conscientious (or junior, or caring) academic teacher to tackle, in the face of depressingly poor odds of success. The metaphor of student writing in higher education as a ‘hot potato’ may be fanciful but it goes some way to conveying the sense that work around undergraduate writing is something that has not yet found a comfortable location in the UK academy. It highlights another reason why a discourse of writing as a decontextualised and autonomous skill may be so hard to shift – because where a skill is deemed to be transferable from one context to another, future one (like a tidy portable briefcase the student brings to university and takes with them into the job market), it stands to reason that responsibility for the development of that skill in a student can be

deemed to be transferable to others in the student's past contexts. Thus, the resources which are inevitably involved in developing writing become some other person/institution's to provide. This perspective on the ways in which autonomous discourses of writing serve the interests of powerful sponsors has been explored by researchers in the field of New Literacy Studies, particularly in the US, in connection with workplace literacies, the global digital and knowledge economy and the "new work order" (Brandt, 2009; Gee *et al.*, 1996); analysis of data in this study has shown that this understanding can be usefully applied to educational as well as work trajectories, especially in the contemporary market-oriented and skills-driven context of UK HE, and has thus contributed valuable detail to earlier theorisations of autonomous literacy.

In this context, the notion that writing as a skill for employability is the responsibility of HE institutions goes relatively unquestioned (despite obvious problems of 'which' skills for 'which' employment by 'which' employer), while it is commonplace (including amongst participants in this study) to associate writing at university with 'skills' which should have been acquired at school. And so the cascade of blame (with employers at the top) transfers responsibility in one direction while the skills are supposed to (and often fail to) transfer in the other. The student suffers in this way of understanding, since she or he is often held responsible for her own 'independent learning' of such 'transferable' skills, ensuring that she has the flexibility to meet the needs of employers, or may find herself disappointed that someone has not simply 'given' her the skills she needs and has 'paid for', like Martin's unhappy student in section 5.5.3. This arguably leads to a widespread defensiveness and lack of mutual trust where student writing is concerned – a defensive approach visible in the data for participants in this study (e.g. see 5.5.1)

and a readiness to mistrust students where it comes to writing (e.g. in responses to possible 'plagiarism').

Furthermore, although formal assessment at university is increasingly not only taking place in written modes (see 1.1), findings from this study seem to suggest that there is a danger that writing – particularly the traditional academic forms of “essayist literacy” (Lillis, 2001) – could come to carry a greater proportion of the burden of requirements for fairness and accountability within HE assessment than other, less traditional forms of academic semiotic practice (such as personalised forms of writing, and multimodal or jointly produced texts). Traditional academic writing lends itself to these priorities because of the ease with which it can be treated as a decontextualised product, anonymised and impersonalised. As academic styles of writing remain associated with the highest stakes in assessment terms in many disciplines, these are seen to correspond to a desire to minimise risks by emphasising conformity. Thus, despite the proliferation of other modes of assessment, these functions of academic writing may take on even greater emphasis, while functions more associated with writing as part of a learning or exploratory process, or as fun, recede into the background. Innovative processes in the academy are often associated with new assessment genres (Leedham, 2009); there is a danger that such innovation is *confined* to such genres.

### **8.3 Implications for practice**

In this thesis I have shown that aspects of practice which have sometimes been treated in research terms as background – for example questions of limited resources or bureaucratic procedures around assessment - are integral to academic teachers' practices themselves, and so to understanding and, potentially, transforming them. Thus any implications for practice raised by the study represented here are addressed to a range of different audiences, not only to academic teachers in the disciplines themselves, or to the writing and academic developers who work with them, but also to institutional decision-makers and those responsible for the allocation of resources.

#### **8.3.1 Actively reject blame**

Although in some ways, participants' practices reflected the somewhat negative picture painted in the literature, teachers involved in the study certainly *did* on the whole “give thought to what they do” (Ivanič *et al.*, 2000) with regard to student writing. The case studies of participants in this research lend weight to the view that individuals' (tacit and explicit) beliefs about writing, and about writing work, and about the purposes of education, play a major part in shaping their practices as academic teachers, in other words, that values are fundamental, as argued by researchers such Ivanič *et al.* (2000), Gee (1996) and Lillis and Scott (2007). However, findings also suggest that it is important not to overstate the role of individual agency: despite the rhetoric of academic autonomy, academic teachers' choices were far from being unconstrained by institutional, material and discursive pressures. It is important to recognise that particular values do not guarantee certain approaches (let alone their desired effects on students). A good example of



this can be seen in the example of Paul's practice (see particularly Window 3: 207 and 3.6.4, and 7.3.2). His deep commitment to being accessible to students and to widening participation, stemming in part from his own experiences of study, does not necessarily result in practices which demystify academic language use for non-traditional students, because powerful discourses of writing as an autonomous skill, and as dangerous territory where students (and he himself) can fall foul of the academic rules, hold sway for him and in his institutional context.

Thus, the study provides a reminder for practitioners concerned with student writing as to the importance of avoiding blame or moral judgment, and so of slipping into a "deficiency model" of academic development (Clegg *et al.*, 2004). Research such as the present project which takes account of the complex lived realities of academic teachers is useful in avoiding such judgments by foregrounding the material and discursive constraints which may come between a teacher's often good intentions and their actual and perceived impact on students. This perspective may in turn help teachers to work through their own puzzlement and dissatisfaction in the face of apparent failures to communicate with students, and so to work at closing the well documented 'gap' (Street, 2004; Lea and Street, 1998) between teachers' and students' perceptions of academic writing at university.

At the same time, findings in this study suggest that it is equally important also to encourage academic teachers in the disciplines in universities not to blame others for what they might see as 'the state of student writing' and to explode the myth of easy transferability. A good place to begin with this might be to supportively point out the contradictions in teachers' own positions as a way to underline that blame

has a way of rebounding. Consider, for example, Tom, who is clear in his view that school teachers have failed in their responsibilities with regard to his students' writing (unlike the inspirational History teacher he remembers from school). He describes a one-to-one tutorial with a Law student who he feels is underperforming, in which they go through a marked essay together so that Tom can help with "all the basics that [he] took for granted at school", commenting:

*He's been through an entire school education and he says 'nobody has **ever** told me any of that' [Tom's emphasis].*

Tom makes a very similar observation in a second interview, and appears to accept the student's comment at face value. Elsewhere in interviews, however, Tom explains to me that although he tries to talk to students about how to approach "problem questions" in Law (see 4.3.2), for some,

*no matter how many times you tell them ... not one thing has sunk in.*

This suggests an alternative explanation for Tom's student's memories of what he has or has not been told at school – that talking to students about how to write is difficult, that apparently straightforward aspects of academic literacy are actually complex and are not easily taken up by students. Although teachers occupy a powerful position in their engagement with students' texts, since as assessors their verdict will be heard, their power as teachers to ensure 'take up' of their advice by students is less assured. Even those in positions of relative power can

lack 'voice' in a particular context if the frames they bring to an interaction do not match those of their interlocutors (Blommaert, 2010, 2005), or if other factors contribute to a lack of mutual engagement. Academic teachers in this study were generally acutely aware that in their experience "what is learned is not necessarily what is taught" (James); it would be productive to encourage awareness that this is a widespread issue, exacerbated by decontextualised understandings of writing as something that can be learned, once-and-for-all, at school.

Thus study findings suggest that it would be productive and enlightening to foster mutual understanding amongst educators at different phases of study, for example through two-way conversations between university teachers and school teachers, or between employers and universities about their practices (not just where the 'customer' group sets out requirements for the 'provider' to meet). These might help to highlight the intrinsic complexity of learning and teaching to write, and the intrinsically contextual nature of writing (and learning/teaching), and so to avoid unproductive blame. This in turn might help educators to address transitions between the different literacies associated with successive phases of learning, to help students draw on their existing resources for writing, and to avoid assumptions about what they do or should already know. This type of inter-sector dialogue around writing could be fostered by writing developers alongside the interdisciplinary conversations which have been shown to have great benefits (e.g. Murray, 2012; Creme and McKenna, 2010).

### 8.3.2 *Work to redefine writing work as disciplinary teaching*

When the costs were sufficiently outweighed by the benefits to them and to students (combined), academic teachers in this study did seem to find that working with student writing could deeply engage them, helping them reflect on ways of understanding the world in their subject, and how this could be communicated to and by students. Despite powerful forces to the contrary, there were many moments glimpsed in this research where academic teachers recognised the epistemological nature of writing in their discipline and were drawn to engage with student writing *at that level*. It is important for writing and academic developers to acknowledge that there is something to build on here – a sense of engagement, endeavour (risk understood as a positive) in which the role of written language in knowledge-making is acknowledged and understood as a “live” dimension of study and scholarship in any discipline. This would suggest that one way of developing academic teachers’ practice around student writing would be to focus their attention on what it is ‘in it’ for them not only as teachers but as scholars critically interrogating the nature of knowledge in their own disciplines, and to bring to light the epistemological nature of language which many thoughtful academic teachers are already drawing upon in parts of their work. Additionally, if engagement with student writing were to be *recognised institutionally* as closer to the core of disciplinary scholarship, the demands it entails might begin to be more manageable for individuals.

This suggests a role for writing and staff developers which means working collaboratively to share responsibility for student writing by redefining writing work as disciplinary teaching, and to help academic teachers see why their disciplinary

expertise is essential – not just in terms of pastoral support or employability development, but because “the forms of writing in a discipline both construct and are constructed by the culture of enquiry in the discipline” (Chanock, 2007: 273). Furthermore, if the disciplines are to function as a good ‘home’ for academic writing work (see 7.5.3), language and writing specialists need to support academic teachers to create hospitable spaces for writing in the disciplines, not just focusing on creating extra-disciplinary “comfort zones” (Cain, 2011). A focus on students’ meaning-making in the disciplines could be understood as making an important contribution to the reassertion of care as an academic value that Lynch (2009; 2010) and Clegg (2010) and others have called for.

### *8.3.3 Promote ownership of student writing amongst academic teachers*

Closely related to the notion of personal investment for academic teachers in finding better ways to work with student writing in their discipline, is the issue of ‘ownership’, which combines notions both of responsibility but also of reward. Björk *et al.* (2003) claim that it is now generally agreed that the most effective thing university writing specialists can do is to work towards getting disciplinary academics to ‘own’ and ‘take responsibility’ for writing in the disciplines (see 2.4.2). There is a proliferation of evidence from WID-based programmes and academic literacies-inspired interventions which supports this argument (e.g. papers in Clughen and Hardy, 2012, eds.; Deane and O’Neill, 2011, eds.; Ganobcsik-Williams ed., 2006). Academic literacies researchers in particular have emphasised the importance of situated, context-aware practice, steering away from generalised solutions or off-the-peg resources (Lillis and Scott, 2007). This thesis has added to this overall picture: practices experienced as being imposed

from above were often resented or regarded as ineffective, and staff training felt to be of limited value; sometimes participants had a sense of not being trusted, or their expertise valued. They were more willing to take responsibility for writing if they were able to act with a degree of autonomy in deciding how this should be done.

However, the study has shown that an academic culture of autonomy was a mixed blessing: sometimes experienced by participants (and, by implication, also by students) as unhelpfully individualistic and “ad hoc” (Angela, Dan). The dictates of academic ‘autonomy’ also sometimes left participants who had developed effective practices with little sense of how they might influence other colleagues without being seen to overstep the mark. The optimum balance for participants in this study seemed to involve opportunities for respectful dialogue with colleagues and students (within the discipline or related disciplines, with or without writing specialists) and for small-scale, collaborative responses to disciplinary-specific issues and contexts. Findings therefore suggest that there may be greater value for institutions to be gained by resourcing these spaces for collaboration and development, and for creating a climate in which localised collegiate work is valued, than in developing ‘initiatives’ based on generalised notions of ‘what works’ to be applied across the board. This is echoed in a number of existing publications in the fields of writing support and learning development (e.g. Hill *et al.*, 2010; Hutchings, 2006). “Whole institution” approaches (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2011) may be welcome from the point of view of resourcing and visibility, but within that it is important to resist normative pressures, for example in the form of assumptions about “best practice”. As Mitchell and Peake (2010) have argued, the understandable tendency for writing developers to be focused on ‘sustainability’ of

provision and of extending the reach or duration of particular initiatives has drawbacks: perhaps the task in hand should be to shift the sustainability of such work towards the disciplines where it can be continually refreshed in situ by academic teachers.

#### *8.3.4 Redirect resources: solutions at institutional level*

There are other necessary conditions if this sort of work bringing writing and teaching/learning together is to flourish; challenges which cannot be underestimated. Developing the writing of others, as with developing one's own writing, is not a straightforward or quick fix activity: it involves sustained work, effort, time, and thinking, and it is vital that this is acknowledged at institutional level. Undoubtedly, this is not easy in the current climate of diminishing public funding for university teaching, especially in non-STEM subjects. However, this study has added to a considerable weight of empirical evidence that a huge amount of work around students' assessed writing is already taking place in the working lives of disciplinary academic teachers to limited productive effect in terms of student learning or writing development (Carless *et al.*, 2011; Price *et al.*, 2011; Bloxham, 2009). This suggests that there are opportunities to make real changes, by diverting resources into more productive ways of working, but only if institutions are willing to embrace radical solutions. I offer some tentative suggestions here, based on the findings of this study:

##### *❖ Make changes to assessment regimes*

This study highlights clearly that traditional written assessment in the form of essays, for example, has for many teachers become a form of ritualised "hoop

jumping”, or “shoehorning”, and that practices of reading and responding to students’ work, in this context, frequently become drained of meaning. If the amount of formal assessment were to be reduced, some of the time saved could be used for more transformative pedagogies which involve students and teachers in dialogue about their meanings and purposes for writing. But if the amount of assessment cannot be reduced, then a priority of those devising assessment regimes should be to sever the connection between “hoop jumping” and academic writing, even in its more traditional forms, and to find creative ways to free up staff time for a completely different sort of process involving writing for learning, thinking and exploration.

❖ *Embrace diversity in semiotic practices in HE ... without abandoning traditional forms of disciplinary academic writing as potential sites for learning*

There has recently been a valuable diversification of assessment practice which reflects new multimodal and digital technologies (see 1.1). Findings presented here suggest that one potential problematic consequence of persistent difficulties with student writing is a danger that it is seen as playing a negative role at undergraduate level, and may even be avoided for the wrong reasons. As Thesen suggests, “writing ... for all its dark power ... does some things remarkably well” (2001: 144). Even traditional academic writing genres, particularly when approached from a Bakhtinian perspective as contingent and subject to change (see Lillis, 2003), have valuable affordances as well as constraints. Thus it is vital that academic teachers continue to work within as well as outside traditional forms, but without allowing writing to become the



repository for all that is stultifying and negative. This might well involve being open to new written, hybrid and multimodal genres which include writing, to active experimentation with traditional genres (Hamilton and Pitt, 2009) and to pedagogies of “re-genring” (English, 2011). However, it is important not to reserve new exploratory pedagogies for new genres and modes only.

❖ *‘Outsource’ writing work in ways that do not downgrade and which retain disciplinarity*

If writing means working with the stuff of meaning, and is not just a set of techniques, then its development sits uneasily within an industrialised, assessment-driven model of HE. But to respond to such conflicts by resorting to some of the forms of ‘outsourcing’ which emerged in this study – whether this be to locate work with student writing in language support units, to recast it as personal or employability development, or simply to make it ‘disappear’ into the evenings and homes of academic teachers – is ineffective as a means of sustaining the conditions in which student writing can flourish: pedagogic relations on a human scale, mutual exchange, autonomy and engagement, work that is also learning and also play. Thus it is important to ‘outsource’ writing work in ways that do not downgrade and which retain disciplinarity. For example, as illustrated in diverse cases in this study (e.g. Emma, Angela and Paul; see also Creme and McKenna, 2010; Gourlay 2011a), postgraduates and early career researchers have much to offer and to gain from engaging in dialogue with students and colleagues about writing in their discipline, but the resources they bring through their interim positioning, like those of students, need to be more widely valued.

- ❖ *Harness well-funded agendas in ways which do not reduce writing to a problem or side-issue or as simply serving purposes of employers*

Where resources are scarce, the pragmatic reality for academic teachers in the disciplines is that their work will be shaped by agendas which bring funding into their academic departments. In the context of this study, some of the work around writing done by participants as part of their disciplinary teaching role gained and retained a foothold because it answered to contemporary, sector-wide priorities and agendas, for example in the form of 'employability' or 'personal development planning'. However, data analysis has shown how this sometimes resulted in writing being addressed only "as necessary" (Mike), rather than viewed as an 'always necessary' part of learning how to construct meaning and knowledge in the discipline.

The task in such cases for those who regard language and knowledge as inseparable is to find ways to manage the tensions between the sponsors' skills-dominated agendas and the meanings and purposes of students and teachers themselves. This might well entail paying some attention to students' need to be strategic and to think of how they will move on from university study. However, if higher education is a complex, open-ended endeavour which goes beyond supplying the economy with skilled workers, as many of those working in the sector have argued (Collini, 2012; Evans, 2004), then there is value in also addressing writing as a disciplinary concern, about learning to think and work and communicate like a geographer, a historian, a

lawyer or a computer scientist. For example, although it might be that time for productive work around writing can only be found in spaces designated as 'pastoral', this does not preclude an epistemological approach, provided this is built into the pastoral curriculum and not merely addressed in an *ad hoc* fashion.

#### *8.3.5 Take teachers' lived experience into account*

Above all, the findings of this study provide good evidence that it is important to take teachers' lived experience into account when seeking to understand student writing and how to develop it. In some ways, the study suggests that just enabling teachers' voices to be heard is a good start, since a sense of not being heard or recognised was a recurrent theme amongst participants, adding to their disillusion and even to a damaging sense of resignation. But more than this, as well as championing the benefits, it is important not to deny the costs of new, potentially transformative ways of working, and to nurture institutional climates in which disciplinary writing work is valued rather than stigmatised. If such work is accorded lowly status, consigned to the invisible margins of the working day, seen as being in conflict with research, or only for those who care more about students than their own career, there is little reason to believe that academic teachers in the disciplines will be motivated to take responsibility for student writing in a productive way.

Perhaps there is some hope that a reconfiguration of value within higher education may be possible in a system where teaching once again becomes a valued activity, due to the pressure created in a full fee-paying environment. However, as

shown in section 5.5, sector-wide changes over the past few decades have in many instances seen the pedagogic relationship recast as one of student-consumer/teacher-provider, arguably replacing one form of social relation, governed by a “law of distance” (Bourdieu *et al.*: 12) and characterised by “reciprocal mystification” (*ibid.*: 34), with another equally damaging one, which still fails to deliver the mutuality, sense of joint endeavour and dialogue wherein a truly potent pedagogy seems to lie. A marketised model of pedagogic relations is unlikely to result in more student or teacher satisfaction with practices surrounding student academic writing, aligned as it is with impoverished understandings of writing as a transferable skill, an asset for employability, or as a technicality rather than lying at the core of meaning-making.

This inevitably raises deep questions about how academic literacy practices fulfil the purposes of higher education and help to establish its place in the culture and political economy of the UK. The elite ‘ivory tower’ or pleasure garden of academic life such as that invoked jokingly by Philip Larkin (see Personal Reflection No. 3: 73) is now hard to imagine in the context of a mass system, except in particularly privileged corners, yet any move towards more meaningful practices around student writing in higher education is bound up with a vision of the university as more than just a churner-out of ‘skilled’ graduates. The research debate about academic literacies therefore encompasses broad questions such as: “What is higher education for?” One key task that faces practitioners and their universities is to have clearer answers to this large question and the smaller everyday questions which follow from it about what we are doing and why. This thesis makes a contribution towards answering these smaller questions in the context of student writing.

## ***8.4 Critical evaluation of the study***

The particular benefits of the methodological approach adopted, and the challenges it threw up, were discussed in Chapter 3. In this section I revisit some of these successes and challenges, in order to arrive at a critical evaluation of the study, and to set out lessons I have learned as a researcher about how I might do things differently in future. This leads into the following section where I address possibilities for future work.

### ***8.4.1 Relationship between researcher and participants***

Applying an academic literacies-informed methodology in a study where the main focus was on teachers' working lives brought certain issues into play which might not apply in the same way in research with students, particularly issues such as 'face' and the desire to present a reasonably good picture of one's practice, as in much educational research (see 3.4.3 and 3.5.2). However, my position as an institutional outsider in most cases, and my status as PhD student afforded me a more rounded view of participants' working worlds and opinions than might otherwise be the case. There were some undoubtedly frank moments in interviews which are less likely to have occurred in a context where participants were at the same institution. In the case of participants at DLU, where I also work as a teacher, I shared a form of outsider status with them in that none of us were "central academics", to use Sue's phrase, which freed conversation up for other reasons. The study benefited from my access to a more distant and less threatening position.

On the other hand, analysis suggests that I still learned more, particularly in interviews, about what participants were proud of than about aspects of their practice which they regarded as merely adequate or frankly inadequate, although this differed from person to person. Realisation of my own power as a researcher was slow to develop: aware of my novice status, I sometimes under-estimated the extent to which I was viewed as someone who had expertise (in writing, or in teaching and learning) and who therefore might judge participants' practice. As I carried out more interviews I became more aware of what was not being said and made more conscious efforts to probe areas which had been skated over or to go back to aspects of participants' work which they felt were not "relevant" or which they did not think would interest or impress me.

As explained in section 3.5.2, the dynamics of researcher/participant interaction in interviews became part of the study, allowing insight into participants' understandings of writing and what might drive my interest in it. One aspect of interview dynamics which had in some ways a more complex impact on data generation and analysis was my own desire to approach interviews as real interactions between two people, and to move as far away from an instrumental approach as I could. In practice, this meant that I sometimes offered personal responses, rather than always holding back to allow participants' perspectives to unfold largely as monologue; sometimes we moved together towards an interpretation of issues that had come up. A good example of this is the exchange quoted in 7.4.2 where, in response to Angela's assertion that helping a particular student in a particular way was "not really [her] job", I introduce the term "blurred boundary", which now features in the thesis. This illustrates the fundamental nature of interpretive research: data generation and analysis are not separate

phases. My strategy throughout the thesis has been to allow my part as a researcher to remain visible wherever possible; however, I cannot discount the possibility that data generation has been influenced by my own presence in the research in ways which have not remained visible to me, or to the reader.

Participants were almost by definition very busy with their work as teachers, and in other roles and, in combination with my 'outsider' status, this had negative effects on the strength and scope of data generation; for example my reluctance to pursue favours of busy people meant that not everyone did a second interview. A sense that I was imposing on study participants also inhibited some data-gathering, particularly in the form of photographs of participants' working spaces, which I was concerned might seem intrusive, an anxiety confirmed in the case of one participant who later withdrew consent to use photographs of his work space in the thesis.

#### *8.4.2 Data relating to institutional context*

From the outset my interest as a researcher has been in understanding the practices of teachers in the contexts in which they read, write, teach and work. Academic literacies, alongside other HE research, has emphasised the need to understand practice in institutional context. Academic literacies researchers themselves have acknowledged that "institutional conditions" need to be more strongly foregrounded empirically (Lea, 2007; Thesen and van Pletzen, 2006). Coleman's work (2012), for example, addresses the need for empirical research which provides vital underpinning for theorisation of institutional context.

In the present study I have collected some documentary data which throw light on the institutional contexts of participants, and have been able to draw some conclusions about how institutional or “meso” contexts shape “micro” practices occurring within particular teaching and learning interactions (Ashwin, 2008). However, I generally relied on participants’ own initiative in providing such documents, or on their easy availability, thus my analysis is based on what they saw as relevant in this regard or what they had to hand. There would have been a benefit in terms of the framing/depth of understanding of institutional context if this sort of data had been collected more systematically. For example, both Paul and Diane at NU2 were notably preoccupied with questions of referencing, attribution and plagiarism. Further evidence e.g. documents relating to institutional policy, interviews with participants’ line managers or other Academic Conduct Officers, would have been illuminating in interpreting this apparent shared preoccupation and its relationship with the particular institution. One potentially helpful adaptation to the research method would have been to ensure that talk-around-text in second interviews included one “institutional” document used by participants in their work, to probe their ways of using it and their attitudes towards it.

A particular disappointment was the failure to recruit participants from HE contexts situated within institutions broadly dedicated to Further Education (see 3.5.3.), a new, growing and under-researched HE sector. Although the study involved participants from a broad spectrum of types of UK university, this was a significant omission. Ideally I would have been able to find academic teachers based in such settings and willing to take part in the study, which would have considerably enhanced its scope and provided an interesting counterpart to participants based in other institutional contexts.



#### 8.4.3 *Participants' audio-recorded 'talk around text' while marking – a tentative experiment.*

A useful addition to data generated in the study was the version of 'talk around text' produced by some participants while marking students' written assignments. Similar methodologies, in the guise of 'think aloud' protocols have sometimes been tried before in writing research and recently in research in HE assessment practice (see section 3.5.2) but rarely made use of in work which foregrounds reading and writing as social practice. My material provided some insight into the 'lived experience' of marking and feedback-giving by homing in on participants' engagement with particular texts with greater immediacy than in hindsight versions of 'talk around text'. It also brought to the fore the emotional element of this practice, its nature as work, and also provided evidence of the complexity of participants' discourses of writing as played out in the moment-to-moment decisions which construct academic literacies (see 7.3.3). The study would have been strengthened by the availability of more such recordings from a wider range of participants, and by building in a request for participants to consider doing this from the beginning of the project, perhaps affording the opportunity to discuss it in a second interview.

#### 8.4.4 *The absence of the student voice*

The choice I made at the outset of the study to focus on the teacher perspective has inevitably meant a degree of occlusion of the student voice. Where students' views, expectations and experiences are mentioned, these are always *as perceived* or *as presented* by participants, or as inferred by the researcher, e.g. from textual data such as student evaluations. It is important to note that reliable

assumptions cannot be made as to how actual students responded to a particular teaching session, or to feedback given on an assignment, or to a one-to-one conversation about a piece of assessed work. Hence in the thesis I have used tentative language to refer to students' own experiences of their teachers' academic literacy practices. Of course it is important not to downplay the possible disjunctures between teachers' and students' perceptions of what is desirable or successful, or to gloss over the "asymmetries of power" (Sutton, 2011: 48) which structure pedagogic relationships. Empirical findings in academic literacies research of a 'gap' between teachers and students' understandings around writing cannot be dismissed, but the contribution of this study was to concentrate on the teacher's experience of this gap, in order to add a much-needed extra dimension to our understanding of academic literacies; the absence of students' voices in the study is therefore a necessary limitation, to be seen in the context of work in the field as a whole.

### ***8.5 Implications for further research.***

There remains a need, as argued by Bailey and Garner, for "more studies across HEIs into diverse aspects of the teacher experience" (2010: 196), and thus for more research on HE pedagogy as social practice, through methodologies which could be characterised as "in" rather than "on" education (Clegg *et al.*, 2004: 30). In this section I will set out specific ways in which further empirical work could build on this study, and explore some broader implications for academic literacies research.

### 8.5.1 *Specific suggestions for further work*

#### ❖ *More ethnographic work with academic teachers*

There is scope for further research which explores the lived experiences of academic teachers in the disciplines around student writing and other semiotic modes and practices. As explained in section 8.4.2, there is a need in particular for a steadier focus on particular institutional contexts. This could be achieved by research which focuses on fewer institutional contexts and which sets out explicitly to make comparisons between them and how individuals work within them. Studies are also needed which focus on fewer disciplines, for example comparing practice in newer, vocational disciplines compared with more traditional subjects.

#### ❖ *Further study of assessment, feedback-giving and marking as academic literacy practices*

This study has echoed other work in HE studies suggesting that these areas continue to be a source of concern and dissatisfaction amongst staff and students, while occupying a large proportion of academic teachers' time and energy. One way in which this issue could be pursued further would be through work which systematically builds in 'talk around text' methodologies in the form of participants' own audio-recordings, as attempted in a small way in this study. This is a potentially rich area for academic literacies research in that it focuses on the 'take up' as well as the inscription of meaning, and thus could contribute to the recent expansion of the field to incorporate a stronger interest in reading.

#### ❖ *More text-oriented work on academic teachers' role in student text production*

Although the study has incorporated the notion of ‘resources’ as a key aspect of academic literacies, it has focused less on language itself as a representational resource. Thus students’ texts have been somewhat at the margins of the study. Lillis and Scott have argued that there is a need for academic literacies work to “bring text back into the frame by tracking production practices in a dynamic way” (2007: 22). There would be great value in building on the current study by applying Lillis’ concept of “text history” to the development of *students’* written texts. This would enable a detailed understanding of students’ academic text production which took full account of teachers’ multiple brokering role in the journey towards the ‘final’ text, along the lines adopted in Lillis and Curry’s recent research with academics writing for publication (2010). This would entail detailed, in-depth work with a small number of participants and would also require creative solutions to the considerable ethical challenges involved.

❖ *Further work on the role of gender in work with student writing*

One aspect of the study which merits further attention is the role of gender, relevant from a number of perspectives. For example, in section 7.4.2 I touched on the possibly gendered distribution of writing work in some contexts in the study, making a connection with wider issues of gender and power in academic labour. Participants’ discourses of writing work were gendered, through the use of identity metaphors such as “mummying”, or indirectly through metaphors of child care. Other themes of the study have potential resonance with gender: the blurring of public/private, academic/personal and home/work boundaries in writing work lend themselves to an analysis of HE as a “gendered space” (Clegg, 2008). In the present study, only tentative

suggestions could be made as to the significance of gender; it would be interesting to pursue the issue through further research e.g. through analysis of discourses in circulation about writing and writing work at university, and through academic literacies work which highlights gender as an aspect of writer/reader identity, amongst teachers as well as students, building on the work of Hamilton and Pitt, 2009; Read et al., 2005; Schroeder *et al.*, 2002 and Nye, 1990.

#### 8.5.2 *General implications for academic literacies research*

The overall theme of the implications for practice detailed in section 8.3 above is the importance of a deeply integrated, discipline-based approach, which brings disciplinary specialists and writing/language/learning specialists together to create a disciplinary home for writing and writing work. One way in which this integration could be furthered is to make conscious efforts to develop conversations about writing amongst academic teachers *on disciplinary territory*. Collaborations between academic literacies researcher-practitioners and disciplinary colleagues are key to this, but it is also important that collaborative work with a social practice emphasis is disseminated in disciplinary journals and at discipline-specific conferences as well as in “Writing Development” spaces, no matter how welcoming the latter may be in comparison. There have been a few recent examples of this, for example articles appearing in *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* (see Special Issue 9 (2); see also Clughen and Connell, 2012; Cain, 2011; Creme, 2008), *Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education* (e.g. Bhagat and O’Neill, 2009; Shreeve, 2007) and in *Learning and Teaching in the Social Sciences* (Sutton, 2011; Street, 2004). However, there is scope for the

insights generated in writing development and academic literacies work to make a stronger contribution to disciplinary-specific conversations in some pedagogic journals. To take two examples from the same journal: Cameron *et al.* writing as “human geographers and social scientists” in the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* claim that very little has been “said about the critical shift in academic identity that novices need to make” (2009: 270) in their academic writing development. Dummer *et al.* explore what they describe as the “relatively unfamiliar ground” (2008: 473) of using field diaries for assessment, in which students must fuse the academic and the personal. These authors do not appear to draw on insights into these very problems offered by *WID*, *WAC* and academic literacies research. There are barriers to overcome in finding a disciplinary platform for writing research, not least the issues of reputation and status documented in this study as exerting pressures on academic teachers not to be seen to “devote too much attention” (Dan) to student writing, but ‘on the ground’ partnerships between writing and disciplinary specialists and across disciplinary boundaries have a lot to offer disciplinary teaching communities.

### **8.6 Some personal concluding comments**

This thesis began with a discussion of the personal journey I undertook before embarking upon the research project it represents. Intervening chapters have given some indication of how this journey has proceeded throughout the building of the thesis. In section 8.5 above, I have also indicated some ways in which it might continue in future. Arriving at the end of the thesis therefore arguably provides a false sense of completion or closure. However, in these final comments I round off briefly by revisiting the thesis introduction.

In the opening discussion of Chapter 1, I explained that the thesis is based on the premise that writing is epistemological, that academic writing and disciplinary learning go together. Put another way, using a wording which suggests itself in the light of data analysis, the disciplines are the true 'home' of academic writing work. However, the study has shown that in UK HE, they are not always hospitable places for such work. I began with a strong sense, drawn from experience of teaching various subjects at various levels, that writing work is not easy for teachers. Working through this puzzle was a key motivation for my decision to undertake research. Conducting the research and crafting the thesis has gone some way towards responding to this key motivation, explaining for me, and I hope for readers too, how and why work around student writing is often uncomfortable for teachers in the disciplines, and why safe, but stimulating disciplinary spaces are needed if writing is not to be driven apart from learning altogether.

The task for universities, academic developers, writing specialists and academic teachers themselves becomes one of retaining (or reintroducing) practices which acknowledge academic writing as meaning-making – while working towards sustaining its place at the centre of disciplinary learning, teaching and scholarship. This thesis is, I believe, a small piece of evidence that the connection between writing and learning is alive and well where the more generous and hospitable conditions of postgraduate research support it, as they have done for me. My hope is that the exploration of academic teachers' practices around student writing undertaken here will help in a small way to promote such conditions for those studying at undergraduate level in the UK.

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## Appendices

### ***Appendix A: Conventions used in main thesis text***

<b>Description/ representation of feature</b>	<b>Indicates:</b>
'Single' inverted commas.	My word choice: inverted commas used as a distancing device
"Double" (Emma) inverted commas.	The words of study participants (where short quotations are embedded in the text). Attributed where necessary; if no attribution, the words belong to the participant under discussion.
"[students]"ll come to you saying"	Words in square brackets added or used to replace original for clarification.
Words in <i>italics</i>	Emphasis (also for Latin terms).
The use of an indented paragraph, with single line spacing.	Longer quotation from published work or equivalent.
Different fonts to indicate different data types as follows:	(see also Appendix G for transcription conventions).
<i>Arial font in italics.</i>	Longer quotation from interview transcript
<i>Candara font in italics</i>	Quotation from transcription of audio recorded observations, or from participants' audio-recordings.
Corbel font	Extract from printed material.
Courier New font	Extract from electronic text.
<i>Monotype Corsiva font</i>	Extract from hand-written data.
Bradley Hand ITC font in bold	Extract from field note.



***Appendix B: Sample letter of approach***

Jackie Tuck

Open University

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0117 966 4330

February 2009

Dear Colleague

**Re: PhD research study: An exploration of tutor practice around student writing in UK Higher Education**

I work as a tutor in English Language (including linguistics and literacy studies) within the Faculty of Education and Languages at the Open University and as an Assistant Staff Tutor in the South West Region of the OU, based in Bristol. I am currently working towards a doctorate with the Open University in the field of Higher Education writing research.

Following a successful pilot study, I am planning to conduct qualitative research exploring the work which mainstream lecturers and tutors do around student writing in Higher Education. I aim to focus particularly on the experiences and perspectives of tutors and lecturers themselves as they engage with student writing and written assessment. By "mainstream" tutors and lecturers, I mean those engaged in teaching a subject specialism

(it does not matter which subject(s)), including work with undergraduates. This could be in *any setting* where students are taught at Higher Education level. (I am specifically NOT looking for lecturers/tutors whose professional role is specifically focused on writing or assessment e.g. who are based in language support or writing development units, or who work in HE staff development or training.)

Broadly, I am hoping to conduct 2 x one-hour interviews with each person over a period of up to two years; I also hope to collect data in the form of written or printed documents of various kinds.

I am hoping that the study will shed light on the lived experience of subject tutors and lecturers in HE, and thus be useful to teachers in supporting students' writing, and to institutions in supporting the work of teachers and tutors as they engage with students' learning, writing and written assessment. In my pilot study, participants said that they had found it helpful to reflect on their practice during the course of our interview.

If you feel that your work fits the above description, and you would be willing to participate in my research, I would be very grateful if you could contact me at the above e-mail address or telephone number. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have further questions.

Yours faithfully,

Jackie Tuck

## ***Appendix C: Inventory of texts gathered***

### **1. Students' Written Assignments and related assignment-specific documents**

<b>Participant/ type of institution/ academic subject of module</b>	<b>Description of assignment:</b>	<b>Exact assignment "title"?</b>	<b>Written assignment guidelines for students?  Inc. module handbooks and model or sample assignments</b>	<b>Student script?</b>	<b>Tutor comments?</b>	<b>Separate feedback sheet?</b>	<b>Moderator comments ?</b>
Sue/DL/ Introductory Science Level 1 [08J]	1 <sup>st</sup> assignment (std SMD); series of questions, some requiring longer written answers.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	2 <sup>nd</sup> assignment (std SMD); series of questions, some requiring longer written answers.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	2 <sup>nd</sup> assignment (std MW)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	2 <sup>nd</sup> assignment (std SG)	✓	✓			✓ (handwritten)	
	2 <sup>nd</sup> assignment self-reflection materials						
Sue/DL/ Introductory Science Level 1/ [09B]	5 <sup>th</sup> assignment; series of questions, some requiring longer written answers.	✓	✓ inc. Sue's own				

Sue/DL/ Introductory Science Level 1/ [10B]	2 <sup>nd</sup> assignment; series of questions, some requiring longer written answers.	✓	✓	✓ a sample (std HS)	✓		
Sue/DL/ Introductory Science pre-degree level	1 <sup>st</sup> assignment; series of questions, some requiring short (up to 250) written answers; (std IJ).	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	1 <sup>st</sup> assignment; (std VG).	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	2 <sup>nd</sup> assignment; series of questions, some requiring short (up to 250) written answers; std CM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	2 <sup>nd</sup> assignment; std SMB	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sue/DL/ Level 2/ Environmental Science	2 <sup>nd</sup> assignment; series of questions, some requiring short (up to 200) written answers (std JT)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Tutor quotes monitor comment
	2 <sup>nd</sup> assignment; (std GT)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Russell/DL/Level 1/ Social Science	5 <sup>th</sup> assignment; “descriptive report”	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Pam/DL/Level1/ Social Science	1 <sup>st</sup> assignment; 1 short essay (1,000 words) plus two shorter exercises (1,000 words in total)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Quoted verbatim (not provided).
James/P1992/Level 3/Human Geography	Third year Dissertation – lit review draft			✓	✓	✓ (summary end comment)	

James/P1992/ Level 3 /Human Geog	Third year Dissertation					✓ (e-mailed feedback, not on script)	
Mike/P1992/Level 2/ Human Geography (UL)	Module essay (1500 words)	✓	✓		Described in audio data		
Mike/P1992/Level 3/ Human Geography (GG)	Reflective diary in stages; each stage a specific task; approx. 2,500 words total.	✓	✓ Inc. advice for each stage.	✓ (3 from batch of approx. 12)	None given	✓ (all of batch)	
Mike/P1992/Level 2/ Human Geography (FW)	Individual field work report.	✓	✓				
Deborah/P1992/Level 2/History (Theory and Practice of H)	Portfolio assignment; series of tasks relating to use of archival materials, over several weeks; entire portfolio can be submitted after redrafting. Std HC.	✓		✓ (second draft)	✓		
	Portfolio assignment. Std FH	✓		✓ (first draft)	✓		Summary of two markers' discussion of second draft.
	Secondary Sources Survey: report (2,500 words approx). Std FH.			✓	None given	✓	2 <sup>nd</sup> marker comment.
Paul/P1992/Level 2/Sports	First assessed assignment; short essay (750 words)	✓	✓			✓	

Development							
Paul/P1992/Level 3/Sports Development	Dissertation draft chapter – lit. review.			✓	✓		
Diane/P1992/Level 1/ Sports Science	2 <sup>nd</sup> assignment – essay approx. 1,000 words.	Student's version of title		✓	✓	✓	
Diane/P1992/Level 2/Sports Science	2 <sup>nd</sup> assignment – written version of presentation of student's own data and analysis. Two students CM and BE.		✓	✓	Both annotated to indicate potential plagiarism	Summary of plagiarism findings	
Dan/RG/Level 2/Physical Geography (Res Methods)	Brief report illustrating strategy used to estimate the height of a building. Group exercise. 3 group assignments in moderator's package	✓	✓	✓ (3)	✓	✓	Moderator comments
Dan/RG/various/ Geography	Various sample topsheets for a range of assignments (5).					✓ (range)	
Emma/RG/Level 2 /Computer Science	Students develop, test and submit computer “code” and write brief report, including evaluation.	✓ (in so far as written down)	✓	✓	None given	✓	
Emma/RG/Level 3 /Computer Science/(S and C)	Group exercise to carry out a small piece of research on a chosen topic and write up as a research article; Group 13 2008	✓	✓	✓	None given	✓	
	Group research article; preparatory abstracts for all groups, with feedback; 2010	✓	✓	✓ (14)	(oral only feedback collected)	(oral only feedback collected)	

	Group research article: final assignment; 2010			Groups 7, 10, 14, 2010		For group 7 only	
Tom/OB/Level 2/Law (Torts) 2009	Post-mods; 2 weekly essays (student JT)	✓	Not specific ones	✓(2)	✓	n/a	
Tom/OB/Level 2/Law (Contract) 2010	Post-mods; 3 <sup>rd</sup> weekly essay (stds KM and MA)	✓	Not specific ones	✓(2)	✓	n/a	
	Post-Mods; 6 <sup>th</sup> weekly essay (stds KM and MA)	✓	Not specific ones	✓(2)	✓	n/a	
	Exams Scripts stds NHE + JB	Exam paper	Not specific	✓	✓	n/a	
Angela/OB/Level 1/Anthropology	Pre-mods: Weekly essay on "rites of passage" 2 students.	✓	Not specific ones	✓(2)	✓	n/a	

## 2. General (not assignment-specific, non-feedback) guidance on writing for students issued by participants.

Participant/ Institution-type/ Academic subject	Description of document(s)	Notes
Sue/DL/Science	<p>Assessment Handbook, Assignment Handbooks on three courses; levels 1 and 2.</p> <p>Tutorial handout with tips on writing longer answers level 1.</p> <p>Tutorial hand-out with tips on Maths and "Study Skills" level 2.</p>	<p>Not written by tutor</p> <p>Written by tutor</p> <p>Written by tutor</p>
Emma/RG/Computer Science	Course website material (assignment-specific, but with many aspects apparently addressed at student writing in the discipline in general) for Level 3 module.	Written by Emma, building on notes made by earlier module leaders; no clear indication of which is which, but other information enables a reasonable estimate of which bits are Emma's. Includes guide written by E from standpoint of a NNS of English, for benefit of overseas stds.
Dan/RG/Geography	<p>Style Guide – document accrued over years.</p> <p>Tutorial guidance materials used by DR, including resource pack and</p>	<p>Written by Dan.</p> <p>Partly written by Dan, partly obtained from</p>



	<p>related materials.</p> <p>Powerpoint on scientific language.</p> <p>Guidelines from a journal in the discipline, referred to by DR.</p> <p>Hand-out on “graphical literacy”</p>	<p>colleagues.</p> <p>Written by Dan.</p> <p>Taken from Journal web page?</p> <p>Written by Dan.</p>
Tom/OB/Law	“Handbook for New Students” [pseudonym]	By Tom and a colleague, with acknowledgement of previous versions by former college tutors.

### 3. E-mails.

Sue/DL/Science	E-mails posted to two online tutor group forums, levels 1 and 2. Several hundred messages – approx. 50 relating to writing.	Tutors’ e-mails and those sent by selected students are available.
Pam/DL/Social Science	Short e-mail exchange between student and tutor about students’ decision to withdraw from course.	
Dan/RG/Geog	Three e-mails following up interviews from Dan to Jackie.	
James/NU1/Geog	Series of e-mail exchanges with students on a range of writing-related issues.	Selected by James.

#### 4. Evaluation forms (students evaluating tutors).

Dan/RG/Geog	Report on student module evaluation.	Comments made by students, written up as report by Dan for department/exam board.
Tom/OB/Law	Evaluation forms (various 5) done via Survey Monkey.	Form design not standardized for institution. Seen by D.O.S. and tutor
Angela/OB/Anthropology	Evaluation form	Designed by A, on voluntary basis, seen only by students and herself.

#### 5. Articles written by participants and brought to JT's attention

Mike/P1992/Geog	Article about tutoring Level 3 specialist module	Published in pedagogic discipline-specific journal.
Robert/P1992/Geog	Article for departmental newsletter on drawbacks of focusing on assessment.  Article for departmental newsletter on drawing for geographers.	Rejected by departmental managers; subsequently basis of a conference paper at a disciplinary conference.
Angela/OB/Anthrop	Article on benefits of seeking student evaluation.	Published in small disciplinary-specific pedagogic journal.

**6. Participants' own published statements about themselves.**

Mike/P1992/Geog	Extract from university web page	
Russell/P1992/Geog	Extract from university web page	
Deborah/P1992/Hist	Extract from university web page	
Emma/RG/Computer Science	Extract from university web page	
Robert/P1992/Geography	Extract from university web page	

## 7. Miscellaneous relevant texts

Mike/P1992	Information leaflets issued by study support unit.	
Dan/EO/ME RGU	Article about student fee rebellion at RGU	
Robert/P1992/Geog	Reader issued to first year Study Skills for Geographers students for formative reading/writing task.	
Robert/P1992/Geog	Completed top sheet on an assignment from Robert's faculty	Not Robert's
General	Material from a Northern University which illustrates university publicity around "feedback".	Kindly collected by Florence Du Jardin.

### ***Appendix D: Data inventory, listed by participant***

(Field notes are in addition to the data listed.)

<b>Partici pant</b>	<b>List of data</b>	<b>Partici pant</b>	<b>List of data</b>
Sue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 1: transcript</li> <li>• Interview 2: transcript</li> <li>• Texts for interview 2:</li> <li>• ASSGN 01 and 02 08J information and guidance.</li> <li>• Monitored and Marked student assignment ASSGN01 08J S104 (Student SM-D) plus TOPSHEET feedback and monitoring top sheet (Monitor's comment on assignment also).</li> <li>• Same student's subsequent assignment (ASSGN02 08J) and TOPSHEET feedback.</li> <li>• One other student's ASSGN02 08J, with feedback (student MW)</li> <li>• One other student's TOPSHEET feedback for ASSGN02, 08J only (student SG- handwritten TOPSHEET).</li> <li>• Student's self-reflection materials for ASSGN02 S104</li> <li>• ASSGN 01 08C Y161 information and guidance</li> <li>• <i>Monitored and marked assignment ASSGN01 08C Y161 (student IJ) plus TOPSHEET feedback and</i></li> </ul>	Mike	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 1: transcript (plus handwritten notes)</li> <li>• Interview 2 transcript</li> <li>• Texts for interview 2</li> <li>• Set of feedback comments on reflective diary assignment of one cohort of 3<sup>rd</sup> year Gender module</li> <li>• Set of pre-task advice sheets given to students for each diary installment</li> <li>• Assignment handbook including information about reflective diary assignment</li> <li>• 3 students' reflective diary assignments, matched to feedback responses (taken from larger set above).</li> <li>• Tutor's published article re the delivery of this module and its assessment</li> <li>• Observation of brief assignment feedback/forward individual sessions (variety of assignments, 5 Liverpool field trip assignments due in soon; 2 feedback on Impressionists essay; May 2010)</li> </ul>

	<p><i>monitoring topsheet.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Another student's assignment ASSGN01 08C Y161 (student VG – not monitored)</li> <li>• Monitored and marked assignments ASSGN02 08C Y161 (students CM and SB) including TOPSHEETs</li> <li>• ASSGN 02 08 S216 information and guidance</li> <li>• Two marked assignments: ASSGN02 S216 08 (students GT and JT) with TOPSHEETs (not monitored).</li> <li>• Hand-written notes of unrecorded words during second interview.</li> <li>• E-mail re second interview and accompanying field note.</li> <li>• Observation of June 2009 S104 09B tutorial – recordings plus notes made at the time.</li> <li>• ASSGN05 information and guidance drawn on in tutorial</li> <li>• Tutor's hand-outs given out in tutorial</li> <li>• Forum messages for S104 and S216 09B; permission for use from Sue + certain students only. Messages and attachments include tutorial notes from tutorials before the observed one for this group.</li> <li>• Screen shots of forums.</li> <li>• "Self-recording" of marking a batch of ASSGN02 S104 2010</li> <li>• Assignment rubric for ASSGN02 2010 version.</li> <li>• Student essay example for this ASSGN</li> <li>• Photos of Sue's work station in her bedroom at home.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notes made during observations.</li> <li>• Textual materials relating to the Liverpool field trip and assignment.</li> <li>• Notes made from conversation with Mike re marking presentations.</li> <li>• Audio-recording of marking of one assignment (Impressionists assignment) from <i>Landscapes</i> module</li> <li>• Some brief notes contextualizing the marking of the batch, and Mike's views on the self-recording process.</li> <li>• Module information including rubric and guidelines for the impressionists assignment.</li> <li>• Powerpoint materials used in f2f session introducing the assignment.</li> <li>• Photos of Mike's office x 2</li> <li>• Student Guide provided by students' union at Mike's university, which includes information about "study skills"</li> <li>• Student Support Services leaflet about disability and dyslexia at NU1</li> <li>• Mike's personal statement on website (received prestigious teaching award).</li> <li>• Extracts from institution website 19/11/10</li> <li>• Information for staff and students about new student services brand.</li> </ul>
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Emma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 1: transcript</li> <li>• Interview 2: transcript</li> <li>• Texts for interview 2:</li> <li>• 2<sup>nd</sup> year student assignment plus EMMA's feedback paragraph. Assignment instructions</li> <li>• 3<sup>rd</sup> year student group assignment plus EMMA's feedback and assignment instructions</li> <li>• Instructions for 3<sup>rd</sup> year assignment from website, including feedback on previous years</li> <li>• Model and template assignment provided to 3<sup>rd</sup> year students</li> <li>• Recordings of short group tutorials around student abstracts.</li> <li>• 14 abstracts with handwritten notes from observations.</li> <li>• Field note written after observations</li> <li>• 2 completed group assignments</li> <li>• E-mail containing feedback on one assignment and the presentation students did.</li> <li>• Screen shots from VLE</li> <li>• EMMA's personal university webpage [ Nov 10]</li> </ul>	Deborah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 1: transcript</li> <li>• Interview 2: transcript</li> <li>• Texts for interview 2:</li> <li>• Brief note on interview schedule re "being a historian".</li> <li>• Marked assignment 1 (student FH, a redraft with comments by Deborah) portfolio assignment with Deborah's topsheet of feedback for first submitted draft. Record of discussion with second marker and final agreed mark.</li> <li>• Marked assignment 2 (same student FH) on "secondary sources", with cover sheet feedback from first and second marker – but comments on the script not visible.</li> <li>• Marked assignment 3 (student HC, first draft (?)) with comments by Deborah portfolio assignment. No top sheet.</li> <li>• Field note from day of first interview.</li> <li>• Field note from second interview.</li> <li>• Extract from Deborah's web-page</li> </ul>
Dan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 1: transcript</li> <li>• Texts for interview 1:</li> <li>• sample feedback sheets referred to at interview</li> <li>• blank dissertation feedback matrix</li> </ul>	Tom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 1: transcript</li> <li>• Texts for interview 1:</li> <li>• 2 assignments by student JT (16/10 and 12/11) – Tom talks about work with him on his writing and supplied these after the interview.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hand written notes on interview 1</li> <li>• Interview 2: transcript</li> <li>• Texts for interview 2:</li> <li>• Package for a moderator consisting of three marked assignments on a surveying task with top sheets, generic feedback sheet for the whole student group, assignment instructions, and “moderation checklist”</li> <li>• Summary of student feedback on a unit, plus tutor’s reflection on the student feedback to be sent on to “year director”.</li> <li>• Response to student feedback on unit to students</li> <li>• Sample tutorial curriculum supplied to tutor by senior manager</li> <li>• Tutorial resource pack also supplied to academic tutors by the School</li> <li>• Materials pointed to in the resource pack e.g. on how to go about writing essays</li> <li>• Tutor’s “style guide” and power point on non-scientific language</li> <li>• Tutor’s handout on “graphical literacy”</li> <li>• Further generic feedback sheet on same surveying task assignment one year earlier</li> <li>• Authors’ guide issued by a Journal publisher</li> <li>• 3 E-mails from Dan</li> <li>• Online article about student fee rebellion at Dan’s university</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sample problem assignment and Tom’s suggested answer.</li> <li>• Interview 2: transcript</li> <li>• 2 marked essay-style assignments for students KM and MA.</li> <li>• 3 sample Survey monkey evaluation forms.</li> <li>• “Handbook for New Students” by Tom and a colleague</li> <li>• Student handout giving information about assignments for “this term”.</li> <li>• Course guide, including reading lists.</li> <li>• Problem question to be prepared by students at observed class.</li> <li>• Handwritten notes made during observed class.</li> <li>• Recording of observed class.</li> <li>• Photos of Tom’s room [permission to use withdrawn].</li> <li>• Audio-recording of marking, with copies of scripts</li> </ul>
James	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 1: transcript</li> </ul>	Pam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 1: transcript</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 2: transcript</li> <li>• Texts for interview 2: selection (made by James, see 3.8.1) of e-mail exchanges with students engaged in writing dissertations, plus feedback on a dissertation literature review</li> <li>• Notes on interviews.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 2: transcript</li> <li>• Text for interview 2:</li> <li>• Marked assignment and TOPSHEET feedback.</li> <li>• Monitoring form discussed not provided.</li> <li>• E-mail exchange between Pam and one student.</li> <li>• Other:</li> <li>• ASSGN instructions for assignment.</li> </ul>
Angela	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 1: transcript</li> <li>• Texts for interview 1: evaluation form</li> <li>• Interview 2: transcript</li> <li>• Texts for interview 2: two marked assignments on the same topic</li> <li>• Photo of Angela in her "office".</li> </ul>	Paul	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 1: transcript</li> <li>• Interview 2: transcript</li> <li>• Texts for interview 2:</li> <li>• Assignment top sheet with feedback for SPD203</li> <li>• A draft of a student's literature review for a dissertation, annotated with comments from Paul.</li> <li>• Course module handbook for SPD203</li> </ul>
Diane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 1: transcript</li> <li>• Interview 2: transcript</li> <li>• Texts for interview 2:</li> <li>• Feedback cover sheet and marked assignment</li> <li>• Two plagiarism reports on alleged "collaboration" by two students, compiled by Diane as their subject tutor.</li> </ul>	Russell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 1: transcript</li> <li>• Interview 2: transcript</li> <li>• Texts for interview 2:</li> <li>• ASSGN guidance notes, plus additional ASSGN guidance notes about report writing.</li> <li>• Student's marked assignment, plus TOPSHEET comments</li> <li>• Interview 1: transcript</li> </ul>

Martin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 1: transcript</li> </ul>	Robert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copy of sample (pink) top sheet from the institution (not filled in by Robert)</li> <li>• Article: Is it assessed, Robert? rejected by the department for publication in the departmental newsletter.</li> <li>• Alternative article – published in its stead (on a different topic)</li> <li>• Reader issued to first year Study Skills for Geographers students (discussed in interview).</li> <li>• Extract from Robert's web-page</li> </ul>
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***Appendix E: First interview checklist***

**Jackie Tuck PhD Study**

**Interview Question checklist/guide**

What subjects do you lecture/tutor in?

What sections of student population do you teach?

Roughly speaking, what proportion of your work is spent on the teaching side (not just writing, but everything) and what on the research and admin side?

Could you tell me about what you do, as part of your role as Lecturer in [X], which is intended to help students directly with their writing?

What about...

- Teaching
- Guidance supplied in written form
- Feedback on assignments
- Work on writing in smaller groups or 1-1
- Referrals to other members of staff
- Student-initiated contact
- Conversations, e-mail exchanges or other informal communication
- other

Can you tell me about any work you do which relates to students' writing but which does not involve direct contact with students?

- training, staff development
- formal meetings
- informal conversations with colleagues
- other

How do students respond, in your view, to the interventions, approaches or other contacts you have described?

Do students respond differently to the different forms of contact/help? Do different students respond differently?

How do you know what students think about your comments?

How does this work you have described fit in with the rest of your day-to-day working life as a lecturer in [X]?

- When does it happen?
- How much time does it involve?
- Is there time for it? Is time allocated/paid for?
- What else does it compete with?
- Where does it take place?

How do you view the work around student writing that you have described, in relation to your work as a whole? What is the significance of this work to you?

How do you think student writing is viewed by the Department/ Institution as a whole?

How is the work you have described in this interview around student writing viewed by the Department/University as a whole? E.g.

- Status
- Importance
- Centrality
- Changes over time in student writing or work done...

## ***Appendix F: Guidance notes for audio-recording of marking***

### **Guidance notes for audio recording for Jackie T**

Please adapt any of the following to suit you.

#### **Aim:**

The aim is to get as close as possible to the “experience” and practice of marking students’ written work.

#### **Technical notes:**

1. Slide back “hold” button on side of recorder.
2. Position recorder with top pointing towards you e.g. on the desk or table where you are sitting (the nearer the better).
3. Press Rec/pause button [red] to record
4. Press STOP button to stop recording or PLAY/STOP button to stop the recording *and/or* listen to it.
5. Voice Activation is purposely switched *off* (this is because Jackie needs a recording which provides accurate timings).

#### **Recording guidance:**

1. If it seems helpful, imagine that you are talking to Jackie rather than to yourself or a recorder. Alternatively, imagine it as an audio-diary entry.

2. Jackie will come back to you to check you are happy with her use of any of the data from recorded interviews or self-recording, so please try to feel comfortable!
3. Remember to keep talking!
4. If possible:
  - Start with a brief recording when you receive or collect the batch of assignments (where applicable).
  - Record your thoughts when you start marking the chosen assignment(s) including mundane information about where you are, your surroundings, the time of day, how you are feeling etc.
  - Do a continuous recording (lasting no more than an about an hour) while you mark this assignment (or two or three).
5. Jackie is interested in anything which can throw light on:
  - **What you are doing, or aware of not doing** (e.g. words you are writing on the script and why, technology you are using, marks you are making, decisions to skip text, not to repeat comments, etc.)
  - **your views off/feelings about/attitudes to what you are doing or not doing** (e.g. responses to what you are reading, reasons for any comments on their work you are making, any judgments you are making about scripts or students, your own feelings about carrying out the marking task, about anything else which occurs such as interruptions etc.)

When you have finished your recording, if you could let me know and I will come and fetch the recorder and the recording and get back to you when I've transcribed it and know what I plan to use, as always, completely anonymously.

*Thank you!*

### ***Appendix G: Transcription process and conventions***

- Hesitations, repetitions, pauses, filled pauses and false starts were recorded if I felt they aided interpretation. They were then removed from representations of transcribed speech, and punctuation added, for ease of reading.
- Non-verbal information, such as tone of voice, gesture, or laughter, was also included when they seemed to offer clues as to how the speaker would like their meaning to be taken up Briggs (1986).
- Participants' accents varied (from one person to the other); I transcribed all in conventional standard orthography. Occasionally, where a speaker varied from their own usual accent in a meaningful way, the change of accent was noted, as were occasional departures from non-standard wordings (for example, "ain't").
- Small omissions and changes were made in transcripts to avoid breaching anonymity or confidentiality.



### Transcription conventions used to represent participants' speech

...	Words from transcript omitted
[laughter]	Non-verbal sound or gesture
[enunciated          very          clearly] <i>Impressionism</i>	Information about sounds of speech e.g. speed, intonation, pitch (comes immediately before relevant words)
A: ... heavily collared for time <u>so</u> J: <u>yes</u> that's interesting	Overlapping speech (underlined)
(.)	Pause
<b>oh:: my::</b>	Noticeably elongated vowel sounds.
<b>yet I can't help myself</b> [my emphasis].	Jackie's emphasis.
This is <b>way</b> more interesting to read [Emma's emphasis].	Participants' emphasis.
<i>We hear this repeated back to us over and over again 'the historians aren't interested in new pedagogic ideas'.</i>	Suggestion of another voice/ intonation suggests distance
"[students]'re trying to get every inch out of [their experience at OBU]"	Information changed or added for clarification
J: I wonder what [I don't know I] <i>he or she meant</i>	Second person speaks during another's turn

***Appendix H: Sample e-mail setting up second interview***

Dear Name

Ideally what I'd like to do would be to spend a short while following up one or two things from last time, and then to focus on two documents/texts which relate in some way to your work surrounding students' writing (in this case, the focus would therefore be on your OU work).

These could be, for example:

- Marked assignment(s)
- PT3 feedback
- Module review report or moderation document (e.g. monitoring report)
- Teaching materials – e.g. your dos and don'ts handout
- Course assessment handbook (I would ask you about how you use it)
- Any textual evidence of support offered during the writing of an assignment – e.g. e-mails to a student, and/or an assignment where a student has had support of one kind or another.

etc...

Anything you think reflects the work you do surrounding students' writing, and that you feel happy to talk about, will be fine.

I have found that the second interview generally works better if I have had sight of the documents where possible beforehand. In the case of a students' work, it would be ideally anonymised (but of course I will anonymise if I find anything identifying). I can seek the relevant student's permission in an e-mail sent via you, if you consider this necessary (I won't be using large chunks of students' texts as data - I am more interested in the tutor's responses).

If the texts you choose are not easily e-mailable (e.g. if they involve handwritten script), you could leave them for me at the Reception of your building, drop me an e-mail to let me know and I can easily pick them up from there.

Would this be OK?

I'll very much look forward to hearing from you and to meeting with you again.

Jackie

***Appendix I: Ethical approval Memo*****The Open University**

From John Oates

Chair, The Open University Human Participants and Materials Research Ethics  
Committee

Research School

Email [j.m.oates@open.ac.uk](mailto:j.m.oates@open.ac.uk)

Extension 52395

To Jackie Tuck Post-graduate research student CREET/ALLRU

Subject An exploration of tutor practice surrounding student writing in UK Higher  
Education from the perspective of “mainstream” HE tutors and teachers.

Ref HPMEC/2009/#539/1

Date 12 March 2009

Memorandum

This memorandum is to confirm that the research protocol for the above-named research project, as submitted on 12th March 2009, is considered to be minimal risk and it is considered that due care has been taken in providing for information to participants, seeking consent and managing data security.

Your application is approved by the Open University Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee by Chair's action.

John Oates

Chair, OU HPMEC

***Appendix J: Consent forms***

Jackie Tuck

Research Student

The Open University

[jt75@tutor.open.ac.uk](mailto:jt75@tutor.open.ac.uk)

Dear Participant

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this research, which I am conducting in accordance with the British Educational Research Guidelines. Details of these can be found at:

<http://www.bera.ac.uk/files/guidelines/ethica1.pdf>

My study has received clearance from the Open University Human Materials and Participants Ethics Committee. I want to assure you that I will of course anonymise any of the data that I might collect and use in the outcomes of this research project. No material collected during interviews or observations will be used in such a way as to enable any person or their institution to be identified. I will also make sure that none of the written documents referred to or collected could be identified in any way in any reports or publications resulting from the project.

I am happy to provide debriefing information about the eventual outcomes of my research, should you be interested – please let me know if you would. For further information about the research, please see the separate sheet provided.

I do hope that you will be willing to give permission for the use of anonymised data arising from your participation in the research in project presentations and publications. If you are happy to do so could you please sign and date below.

May I also assure you that, in accordance with BERA guidelines, you have the right to withdraw your consent for the use of such data at any time, and that this data will be destroyed if you so request, without adverse consequences to you.

Participant Name.....

Signature.....Date.....

Jackie Tuck

[jt75@tutor.open.ac.uk](mailto:jt75@tutor.open.ac.uk)

Tel: 0117 966 4330

Dear Student

**Re: PhD research study: An exploration of tutor practice around student writing in UK Higher Education**

As part of my research towards a PhD with the Open University, I am investigating the work of subject tutors and lecturers in Higher Education in the UK. My study involves tutors working in a number of different institutions, including the OU. *The focus of my study is subject tutors/lecturers themselves and their practices, perspectives and experience, not that of students.* However, inevitably some students will be involved in a peripheral way.

Your tutor Anonymous Participant has kindly agreed to participate in my study. As part of my research I would like to be able to conduct a research observation of one of her tutorials on 20<sup>th</sup> June 10.45 a.m. – 13.15 p.m. I would like to ask your consent for me to observe this tutorial if you plan to be present. I do not need to know any personal information about students and will gather no data which identifies individual students. During the session I will take notes and may unobtrusively record parts of the session. No data I use will enable any person to be identified by a third party. When I write up and/or publish my findings, the names of participants, and the identity of the University, will not be disclosed.



I hope that my study will throw light on the work of tutors and lecturers in higher education, and that in doing so it will enable Universities better to support their work with students. I hope therefore that your support will help me to make a positive contribution to the development of the work of universities in the UK.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like further information about my research. If you are happy to give consent for me to observe a teaching session in which you take part, as described above, please could you indicate your consent on the separate sheet provided, and give your sheet to Tutor (or if that is not possible, bring the signed form along to the session itself). Please keep this letter for your information. If you plan to be present at this tutorial and have reservations about my request, it would be greatly appreciated if you could share your concerns with me or with Tutor in advance.

With thanks and best wishes

Jackie Tuck

Post-Graduate Research Student (also tutor for the Faculty of Education)

Consent to participate in PhD research project

**Re: An exploration of tutor practice around student writing in UK Higher Education**

Researcher: Jackie Tuck; Open University

I have received information about this study from Jackie and agree to her conducting a session observation at which I am present.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

***Appendix K: SRPP approval***

12 March 2009 12:21:26

Message

From: "IET-SRPP" <let-Srpp@open.ac.uk>  
Subject: SRPP 2009/032 - Panel decision  
To: <jt75@tutor.open.ac.uk>  
Cc: "T.M.Lillis" <tml6@OPENMAIL.open.ac.uk>  
"M.R.Lea" <mrl8@openmail.open.ac.uk>  
Attachments: Attach0.html 6K

Dear Jackie

With reference to your recent Student Research Project Panel application 'An exploration of tutor practice surrounding student writing in UK Higher Education from the perspective of "mainstream" tutors and lecturers', I am pleased to report that Panel approval has been given. The Panel would like to suggest you separate out the Consent Form from the Invitation so that those who participate still have details once the Form has been returned. Once you have agreed who is participating in your research and have the student details, can you pass them back to the SRPP so that we can record who participates please.

We always inform all applicants that Panel approval does not imply either ethical or sample approval should either of these be required. In this instance sample approval will not be required in the normal way as the participants who are involved in your research are the tutors – all you need to do with regard to the student sample is notify us who is involved.

I hope this is clear but please do not hesitate to come back to me if you would like further explanation or information.

With best regards

Jane

Jane Baines

Student Research Project Panel Coordinator

Student Statistics and Survey Team

Jennie Lee Building, Level 1 North

Ext: 53631

Hours: Mon, Tue, Thur, Fri am only

<http://iet-intranet.open.ac.uk/research/index.cfm?id=7082>

## Appendix L: Textual data relating to Figures in main text

L(1a)

the 1980s and early 90s being characterised by the renewed emphasis on punishment (Stephens. 2000).

✓ Newburn (2007) notes how young offenders are treated differently to adult offenders between the ages of ten to eighteen; due to the laws recognition of the vulnerable position these youths are in, they are considered to have more chance of reform than adult offenders.

✓ Steering youths away from negative social behaviour before they start get involved in crime is the most effective way to prevent youth crime (Hartmann and Depro. 2006), whilst Millie *et al* (2005) suggests that some youth may need to be given a custodial sentence, but other need to be engaged in community programs and develop life skills.

### 2.4 Claims for sport with young people

Hargreaves (1986) observes that the government since the 1950s has been increasing the funding it provides to sport, doing this through local authorities and quasi autonomous non-governmental originations. This is due to the realisation that sport can be used as a salience, attracting youths to learn through sport. Wolfenden (1960) reports ethics and morals are learnt through sport, which also underpin

values in wider society.

*He issue that ?*

In the same report Wolfenden (1960) draws attention to youths between school and work have a lack of provisions thus criminal behaviour becoming increasingly prominent in their lifestyles. Nichols (2007) highlights the role youths interaction with their peers and how the ethics and values these peers hold are shared amongst them. Sport can provide good role models, who can use sport to promote and teach positive ethics and values that can be transferred to wider society.

*young people ?*

Coalter *et al* (2000) implies using sport during their leisure time will encourage youth to use the time positively. Nichols (2007) notes that sport can be used as a hook to attract youths who may otherwise not engage with a task or learning, but by using sport, marginalised youth feel they can either concisely or sub-concisely be involved in a positive role in sport and learning.

## 2.5 Sports use with at risk youths

*— Check print preview to ensure format.*

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> October

2009

What purposes are served by the doctrine of vicarious liability? Are these purposes adequately reflected in the current law?

Vicarious liability is a means used by the courts to transfer liability for a tort, or indeed crime, from one individual to another when a special relationship exists between the two which places responsibility for the one actually committing the tort in the hands of the other. Many argue that liability arises under the principle of efficient risk allocation, or even solely to ensure the victim is able to sue a sufficiently solvent party. What is clear, however, is that the doctrine of vicarious liability attempts to ensure the claimant is placed in the position he would have been had the tort not occurred, as the law of torts does in general, and also seeks to warn employers and other parties in the principal role of a master-servant relationship to consider the welfare of their employees and promote good practice.

**Comment:** Think about this sentence; does it quite say what I think you are really trying to say?

**Deleted:** s

L(2b)

The current law on vicarious liability emphasises the need for two special conditions, apart from the general requirements of proximity and duty, to be satisfied before liability arises: a relationship of master and servant, commonly a contract of service, and that the tort arises in the course of employment.

**Comment:** Might have been better to have first gone into the purpose in a little more depth before discussing the requirements. For further discussion.

Winfield expresses the first criterion as someone setting a force in motion for his own benefit taking responsibility for the consequences. Although this is often the case, the courts seem to have acknowledged, although less so now, an element of control as being requisite. Lord Thankerton in *Short v. I&W Henderson* outlined four aspects of a relationship that would give rise to vicarious liability: that the employer has the power to select the servant; the employer pays the wages or provides remuneration; he also has the right to control the method of work and, ultimately, the right to dismiss the servant. In *Stavely Iron & Chemical v. Jones*, a workman of the defendant suffered personal injury when co-operating a crane in order to move items due to the negligence of the driver. The driver would clearly be liable in his own right had he been operating the crane at his own

**Comment:** Ugly sentence.

**Comment:** Is this a purpose or a requirement?

**Deleted:** Thackerton

**Comment:** Is this clear?

**Comment:** He still is, and needs to be, for VL to apply. Be more careful with phraseology.



Leaving a claim for damages in the hands of the courts should always be a last resort for both sides to a dispute. Vicarious liability promotes this cause further by transferring liability from a weak party with limited assets and sparse faculties to argue his case to a company in a much stronger position both financially and in terms of resources. In-house lawyers are likely to wish to settle a claim outside the courtroom, benefitting their client due to the minimising of costs, and the claimant by speeding up the process until damages are paid. Clearly any tool of torts law must ensure satisfactory remuneration for loss through the simplest and most cost-effective and efficient means.

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Comment: Not sure about this. To discuss.

Clearly the financial aims of the doctrine of vicarious liability are well met by the first of the two main requirements for liability, the special relationship, but does it create a just outcome? After all, it is for the courts to impose either punishment, in crime, or liability, in tort, on the party at fault. In *Rose v. Plenty*, a milkman was warned not to allow children to either help him or ride on his cart. A child was injured however after the milkman ignored his employer's warning and the court found the employer liable. This, on the surface, seems unfair and the law meets this cosmetic injustice with its compromise of the second requirement for liability: that the servant is acting in the course of employment.

Deleted: whose

Deleted: the wrong was

Comment: ?

L(2d)

The court in Lister v. Hesley Hall held that a children's home was liable for its warden's abuse of many of the children in their care. It was held there was sufficient proximity between his employment and his acts, that the risk of such abuse is inherent in his position that it is just for the employer to bear the liability. A similar situation has arisen in connection with abuses of children by Roman Catholic priests in Canada, the Supreme Court of which has found the dioceses liable as they have conferred on the priests the power and influence that gave them such unfettered access to children.

Such strict liability however does not seem to produce adequately consistent justice. It may be true that from the claimant's point of view the purposes of vicarious liability are indeed met well: he is compensated and by one who has adequate financial backing. But is this result worth the likely unfairness of many decisions like Lloyd v. Grace Smith and Co., where the company was completely unaware of their clerk's fraudulent behaviour and would never have authorised such actions with their inevitable

**Comment:** Either you think it was unfair or not?

0705279

Exact match

odd words different

12/10/2008

Similarities especially in structure and beginning sections

no detail in results about area of court

### Notation Analysis of Tennis

Notational analysis can be defined as, "An objective way of recording performances so that key elements of that performance can be quantified in a valid and consistent manner" (Hughes, 2004). It is a reliable method of analysis and can be used to improve an individual's or teams performance.

A men's singles tennis match was watched and recorded using a notational system in order to find out which shot was most successful and in which area. The standard of play was at the highest level - the final at Wimbledon; and therefore should give a good understanding of tennis tactics from the shots played and won.

All racket sports have been found to be valuable for the use of notational analysis as the players are constantly involved in the game. In tennis, notational analysis can be a big asset to both the player and the coach.

The aim of this study is to identify which type of shot is most successful at winning a player a point and in which area of the court. A similar study gathers information on basic winning/losing shots. (Hughes & Franks, 1997)

Data was collected by two individuals using the notational analysis system, which was then compared and analysed. From analysing the data, results can be made allowing for a conclusion and finally an answer to the research hypothesis which is 'Most shots will be won by the forehand shot in sections 5 + 6 (the baseline areas)'

This information can benefit a player because he or the coach can evaluate the strengths in their game and either improve further on these, or look to improve on their weaker shot selection. In theory, this should help the player advance to a higher level.



L(3b)

<p>To collect the data needed, a recorded video of the Men's Final 2006 US Open between Roger Federer and Andy Roddick was viewed by two people. The hand notation itself focused only on Roger Federer's winning shots but his forced errors and opponent's unforced errors was also recorded to help work out how well his opponent was playing.</p> <p>Having two people to observe the same data should produce good reliability &amp; validity however, observers can be bias so this was taken into account. Below is the formula used to work out reliability and will be used in the results section</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Number of agreements/Agreements + disagreements X 100</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">3</p>	<p>The flow chart that was designed previously was used to look at the possible outcomes which could occur during the match. The simplicity allowed the viewer to follow it and record information as it happens.</p> <p>In this analysis, a winner is defined as a point whereby the player does not touch the ball after the opponent strikes it. An unforced error is when the opponent isn't put under pressure by the player's shot and should return the shot but fails to do so through lack of concentration, trying something too challenging etc. A forced error is playing a difficult shot to return, resulting in the opponent reaching for it and not getting enough contact on the ball to return it. Judging whether a winning shot if from a forced or unforced error is crucial as it part of the aim of the study.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">4</p>
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## SPS 101- Applied Sport Science

### Sport Science Support for biomechanics in Cricket

Biomechanics is a relatively new discipline of sport science and not much is known about it outside of the world of sport. Biomechanists work closely with athletes and coaches trying to maximise the performance through different techniques analysing different aspects of performance. Examples of these aspects are; the analysis of movement (kinematics), the analysis of force (kinetics), analysis of muscle performance (muscle mechanics) and sometimes the use of maths and numbers to analyse sports performance (modelling). Further areas of analysis that a biomechanist can be used to aid a performer could be; technical analysis, injury and its prevention and also how equipment can affect performance. Throughout the essay I will concentrate on the kinematics, kinetics and muscle mechanical aspects in which biomechanists can aid sporting performance and also how injury can be prevented through biomechanical analysis of technique.

In today's society the amount of pressure on performers to win is immense particularly in cricket, athletes are under the spotlight of the media constantly and are scrutinized at any opportunity. Two prime examples of this media attention are "Muttiah Muralitharan"

not really true!

try to avoid using first person, 'I' or 'we'.

A good introduction, but you could have mentioned the extent of essay in relation to the criteria - eg. literature and organization

and "Lasith Malinga" and their extraordinary bowling actions. Both are extremely unusual yet are both deemed as legal according to the laws of the game predominantly thanks to biomechanical analysis available. The MCC laws of cricket (Law 24.3) states that the definition of a "fair delivery" of the bowling arm is;

'A ball is fairly delivered in respect of the arm if, once the bowler's arm has

reached the level of the shoulder in the delivery swing, the elbow joint is not

straightened partially or completely from that point until the ball has left the hand. This

definition shall not debar a bowler from flexing or rotating the wrist in the delivery swing.' (MCC (Laws of Cricket The 2000 Code 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) - 2008) <sup>page number or paragraph or section</sup>

The use of biomechanists helped aid world cricket find out and deem whether many bowling actions are legal to allow cricket to be played fairly in the "spirit of the game." <sup>These biomechanists - who did they work for in this respect? Organisation</sup>

Kinematic testing in cricket has been used to find out how elite spin bowlers create spin on the ball with different variations of delivery. A prime example of this is the "doosra" delivery and monitoring whether the delivery was within the legal 15 degrees bending

of the elbow. 'A more recent study has established a link between increased elbow flexion and ball release velocity in fast bowling' (Roca et al., 2006). <sup>page number needed for a direct quote</sup> Through

biomechanical assistance we can see how players may try to gain an unfair advantage and if not playing at an elite level players may get away with this due to the lack of availability to biomechanical help at grass roots level. Once again biomechanics can assist that everyone play cricket fairly and in the right spirit of the game. Video analysis was used to record and study how different athletes had varying techniques. The benefits of video analysis are that cameras of very high quality can be used to capture many frames per second and also be able to replay the movement at a much slower rate than real-time motion giving a much greater accuracy of detail. A downside to the video analysis is that with 3D video it can be very complicated, quite expensive and also very time consuming.

when, where, by whom, reference

Kinetic analysis can be used for cricketers by the use of pressure platforms to assess many different things; examples of this are the ground reaction forces of a bowling delivery stride or cover drive off the front foot. Another time when kinetic analysis can be used in cricket is to measure the impact a batting helmet can withstand and therefore be able to detect any faults in equipment that can be modified to ensure safety and injury prevention.

example of this kind of research - the literature?

The use of muscle mechanics is also a crucial part of biomechanics and is vital to cricketers. The use of electromyography (EMG) can find out the reaction time from

when a stimulus is detected and to the point of when the muscles contract in response to this. Reaction time is a key factor to being a successful batsman as you have an incredibly short amount of time to respond and make a decision against high level fast bowlers.

reference

Biomechanists can allow athletes and coaches to help try and prevent injury through technical analysis and this can be essential to elite cricketers as 'It may also be because it is widely considered that fast bowling in cricket is one of the non-contact activities most susceptible to injury' (Fitch, 1989). In sport there are two main types of injury; chronic injury and acute injury. Chronic injury happens over a prolonged period of time and is a build up of many smaller injuries that cause a weakness due to the body compensating to adjust to the pain elsewhere. A classic example of this in cricket is recurring shoulder injuries to Andrew Flintoff due to technique problems. Acute injuries are when forces exceed the body's tolerance and that activities at high speed (velocity) <sup>do not</sup> don't leave enough time to decelerate, in cricket this can occur in the delivery stride of a fast bowler which puts enormous strain on the front leg as stated by Crisp and King: 'Lower extremity injuries are far more common, and often associated with front foot strike in the delivery stride or overuse' (Crisp and King, 1994). Biomechanists can be used for technical advice through video analysis by slowing down the action

2

S0904412



Te

[Redacted]

*"I see in the study of rituals the essential the way to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies" (Victor Turner). Discuss in relations to 'rites of passage'.*

[Redacted]

The study of ritual allows anthropologists to observe beliefs and values in action. Rituals are laden with meaning both to the people who perform them and to the people who watch them. The purpose of my essay is to examine the role of ritual in societies and look at how they shape the 'essential constitution' of society. I anchor my discussion on Van Gennep's (1960) seminal work and proceed in chronological order to look at how Structuralists, like Turner, refined and built up on his work; they went beyond the functionalist interest in ritual as a socially meaningful act and inquired into the symbolism and deeper meaning of ritual. Finally, I turn to more modern approaches to ritual informed by social constructivism, the study of media and the agency of the individual in negotiating the values and meanings of society. I look at the interpretation of rituals in their contemporary theoretical contexts. I argue that ritual does give us enormous insight into the 'constitution' of societies in terms of their values, beliefs, and culture of human societies. But I argue that we need to go beyond looking at the form, function and meaning of ritual to its impacts on their spectators and participants.

Van Gennep (1960) saw rituals as acts that had a transformative social function to

Excellent intro

Good

L(5b)

Van Gennep (1960) saw rituals as acts that had a very specific social function to serve. He argued that life was made up of successive stages like birth, puberty, marriage, death etc. and that to move from one stage to another, a well-defined ceremony was needed to make the transition. Fundamentally, he observed that every ritual has a preliminal (start), liminal (middle) and a post-liminal (end), all of which are characterised by specific rituals. They have aims and they occur juxtaposed to each other. Van Gennep also noted that at the liminal stage there is a 'pivoting of the sacred' that is marked by the inversion of social rules. At the post-liminal stage the individual is reincorporated back to society with a new social status and role in relation to others. Van Gennep compared the transitions <sup>now</sup> to different stages to borders: just as crossing borders requires formalities, so does going from one state to another. Furthermore, the liminal and post-liminal phases of rites of passage often involve ritual 'purification' (cleansing/washing) to separate the individual from previous surroundings. He used the metaphor of doorways to illustrate the idea of going from one status to another. Yet, the revolutionary observation that was made, is that in rites of initiation, the biological puberty doesn't coincide with the 'social puberty'. In other words, the initiation of children into sexual life does not necessarily correlate with their biological sexual maturity. Among the Masai in Kenya, for instance, the age (from 12-16 years old) of initiation depends on the parents' wealth since it is a costly ritual: the richer the parents, the sooner the initiation, the poorer the parents, the longer they will try and put off the initiation for as long as possible. On the other hand, the fact that most initiations left a physical mark (e.g. removal of the foreskin in circumcision) was a symbolic way of asserting one's belonging to a new class.

Van Gennep's (1960) interpretation of ritual pioneered the emerging functionalist wave of anthropology. He blamed the folkloristic wave for taking rituals out of their context and merely collecting them. Van Gennep was concerned ~~with~~<sup>with</sup> considering rituals in their role in the dynamics of the whole of society; he emphasised the politico-legal

23

Pop he addressed  
the farmers

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Not  
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is the most  
"personality"  
! This  
thence...

You still need to put your name, PI number and TMA in the header.

off and should be the happier society, but, obviously there will be other factors that have not been covered that could influence life expectancy and infant mortality rates.

The tiny town of Bhutan has 'happiness' as a central object (rather as developed economies typically have 'economic growth'), and it aims to maximise not GDP/GNI but what it refers to as GNH or 'gross national happiness', exploring social lives (2009 :41). Bhutan has strict rules which include being on political involvement, religious views and have banned many things UK citizens take for granted like T.V. channels and advertisements.

Looking at countries like Bhutan, it would seem to be absent of many freedoms people in the main seven developed countries have and the one major question would be, can people be happy without their freedom of speech, to decide which religion they choose to follow, to have a say in political decision? It would seem people in Bhutan have lost their freedom to live their life how they want to.

**Inequalities**

GNI and GDP shows a country's economical state on average, so does not show what each person is getting individually. In most countries there are differences in what each person gets, some will be getting a high wage

**Comment [K15]:** Can you give evidence to suggest what these are.

**Comment [K16]:** Bhutan is actually a nation state with 700,000 people.

**Deleted:** A

**Comment [K17]:** That's right....why did you call it a town.

**Comment [K18]:** Are you talking specifically about the G7 countries.

**Comment [K19]:** Not sure why this one?

**Deleted:** ies



L(6b)

while others have not got enough to live on.

This is not the only inequality there are many more, including inequalities between different countries. The economically developed countries have more control in the world than the less developed ones. A good example of this is in Exploring social lives (2009 : 129-130), Norway decided to build a power plant, to allow them to build the plant without causing more CO2 they decided to plant a tree farm in Uganda, this sounds good until people realise that the tree farm will threaten the livelihoods of an estimated 8000 people or more, who live, farm and fish on this land. These people had to move, just one consequence of them moving means that trees are knocked down to make room for land for people to live on which, in turn, starts to cancel out the reason that the farm was built. This is just one of many inequalities not just in the access to the atmosphere.

You need to put page numbers here.

SPD203 Current Policy and Practice Issues – Essay 1

Student Name and Number \_\_\_\_\_

Assessment	Outstanding	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Very poor
Summative Assessment						
Understanding of central concepts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Development of logical argument	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use of sources to support argument	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ability to develop analytical account	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
Format and presentation						
Writing style	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Structure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grammar and spelling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Range of sources used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Referencing in text (see below)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X

Structure of the essay:

You headings indicate that you have identified a number of key documents to include in the piece which is good. However, using the heading as you have does help in providing a clear structure but you really need to develop an essay approach to this piece, as you have presented it, it is more of a report format. You should try to write this sort of piece as a number of paragraphs without the headings, where you link each point section with narrative. You should still try to make sure it is clear, but without the headings.

Also – there is a logical structure to talking about these documents based on when they were produced. Try to do more background reading so that you are clearer about these documents and can describe their contents, aims and findings clearly

#### **Formative Assessment** (i.e. areas for improvement)

Be careful about the way you describe documents and initiatives. For instance A Sporting Future for All isn't an organisation; it's a govt policy document.

Be careful with referencing. In text you don't include the title of the document. For a reference you should include the Author (govt dept who published the doc where there isn't an author stated), and the date. For quotes its author, date and page number.

You are crucially missing references in a number of places in your piece. Remember, where you are talking about / describing a piece of work, document, book etc you need to reference this. This is crucial in academic writing so that you don't give the impression you are taking somebody else's work as your own.

Reference list – on a separate sheet at the back please, and remember the order for information on your reference list

Author: Date: Title (Italics): Publisher: Location of Publisher.

I do think you probably should have read around the piece more. Try to make sure you are doing the weekly readings and associated readings. I do think that clarity in your piece would have been much better with more reading.

**Agreed Mark:**

**Signed**..... **Date**.....  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Marked by**.....

*Moderator*

[Redacted]

**School of Geographical Sciences**

**Moderation check list for course work components<sup>1</sup>**

Unit Code and Name: [Redacted] – Research Methods in Physical Geography

Assignment: Basic Survey [Redacted] Building (Group)

Responsible Staff Member: [Redacted]

Markers: [Redacted]

Hand in Date: Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2007 (Week 3)

Date for Return of Material to Students: Friday 30<sup>th</sup> November 2007 (Week 8)

Unit Moderator: [Redacted]

Moderation Package includes:

Written assignment	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes/ <input type="radio"/> No	Ordered student work	Yes/ <input checked="" type="radio"/> No	Feedback document	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes/ <input type="radio"/> No	Mark spreadsheet <sup>2</sup>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes/ <input type="radio"/> No
			N/A				

## Check list

		Comments and/or cases where moderator has adjusted marks (please give candidate numbers and explanation) <sup>5</sup>
I confirm that I have reviewed the documents detailing the set assignment <sup>2</sup>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes/ <input type="radio"/> No	
I confirm the marks awarded to any failed work <sup>3</sup>	Yes/ <input type="radio"/> No	N/A
I confirm the marks awarded to any borderline work <sup>3</sup>	Yes/ <input type="radio"/> No	N/A
I have reviewed a sample of mid-class work <sup>3</sup>	Yes/ <input checked="" type="radio"/> No	
In the event that the course work was group based, the balance between the group and individual elements of the mark are consistent with information given to the students	Yes/ <input type="radio"/> No	N/A



L(8c)

In the event that more than one marker was involved, there is no evidence of between-marker inconsistency	Yes/No	N/A
In the event that penalties have been applied by the marker <sup>4</sup> , this has been done in a manner consistent with information given to the students	Yes/No	N/A
The marker has provided adequate feedback to the students by way of comments on the submitted work	Yes/ <del>No</del>	more detailed than most
The marker has written a document summarizing overall performance on the exercise document <sup>6</sup>	Yes/ <del>No</del>	
Marking has been completed, and work will be returned, according to the dates set in the School's Assessment Timetable	Yes/ <del>No</del>	a week early
Material has been ordered correctly (by candidate number) before return to the School Office	Yes/No	N/A

Signature: 

Date: 23/11/07

Notes

L(8d)

1. To be used for all summative work that contributes to the mark that a student is awarded for the unit, except the final examination (see separate form). Examples include project reports, practical reports, essays, class tests, take-home exams, and oral and poster presentations. Not necessary for any tutorial-related or formative work.
2. All relevant material, including the written assignment given to students should be included in the moderation package. The moderation package should also include a spreadsheet of awarded marks, which flags penalties and marker (in the case of team marking).
3. The moderator must read and confirm the marking for (i) any failed items of work, (ii) any borderline items of work (i.e., awarded 69, 59 etc), and (iii) one item from each degree class (i.e., 70%+, mid-60%, mid-50% and mid-40%). This should not normally equate to more than 10 individual items of work or 10% of the total.
4. Penalties administered by markers include those for non-attendance at compulsory elements of the unit, word length of assignment, as well as any specifics detailed in the assignment document such as those relating to the content and formatting of the work. Late submission penalties will be administered by the School Office.
5. Please ensure that changes are recorded on both the submitted work itself and the mark spreadsheet.
6. Document to be attached to the moderation package and made available to students (preferably on blackboard)

Table 2. Assessment criteria and weighting for each section of the presentation

Section	Questions	Weighting
Introduction	Does it indicate the general significance of the topic as an area of study? Does it allow the reader to establish an outline of the study? <b>Are the aims and objectives of the study appropriate and stated clearly?</b>	10%
Observation Method and Execution	Has the notation method been clearly explained? Are all the definitions included? Has sufficient consideration of errors been presented? Is there evidence of reliability studies? <b>Was the design and execution appropriate for the aims and objectives of the study?</b>	11 25%
Results and Statistical Analysis	Are all the relevant data presented? Does the data presentation focus on the key issues or trends? Have the data been presented clearly and concisely? Is there repetition of data presentation? Have the correct statistical analyses been performed, where appropriate? <b>Does the section progress smoothly &amp; logically, using the data to tell a story?</b>	10 35%

L(9b)

Interpretation  
and  
Conclusions

Are appropriate explanations and interpretations of the findings provided?  
Does the interpretation of the data follow from the data presented?  
Have the right conclusions been drawn from the data?  
Have the appropriate implications of the findings been considered?  
**Dose the author demonstrate how observation data can be used to improve performance?**  
**Is there evidence of an appropriate level of analysis and synthesis?**

30%

### General Criteria that will apply to all sections and may lead to loss of marks:

Structure,  
format,  
presentation,  
grammar and  
spelling.

Is the presentation formatted appropriately?  
Is the general standard of presentation sufficiently high?  
Are there an acceptably small number of problems with spelling, grammar and punctuation?

Referencing

Are there an acceptably small number of problems with English usage?  
Have references been used effectively to support the ideas presented?  
Have references been acknowledged appropriately?  
Are references provided using the Harvard Referencing System?

21%

Student Name:	BENJAMIN
Student No.:	0705279
Module :	SS204 Observation of Sport
Assignment:	002: Coursework, Written Presentation
Date of Investigative Interview:	Tuesday 17 <sup>th</sup> February, 2009

**Details of Suspected Breach**

Suspected Collusion/Plagiarism and Fabrication

Evidence of this breach is indicated by the highlighted sections.

Passages are either an exact match with another student's work or very similar (where it appears that paraphrasing has occurred).

L(9d)

Also, the order in which key points are made is very similar, more so than would occur by chance if working independently towards the criteria

There is suspicion over the provenance of the data as there are claims that a computer system has been used, that buttons have been pressed to collect the data.

Computerised notational analysis was not available in this module for this assignment, nor was it a requirement, and this leads me to believe that the data was not collected by the student, that it was fabricated.

6

Time* (mins: secs)	Transcript of Mike's speech; words also written down indicated in bold. See Appendix G for transcription conventions.
1:38	here we go (.) ok the first comment I'm making is actually on line one where there's a reference to Key Term which could be anybody really that they're citing, possibly Schopenhauer I suppose, but they haven't referenced the author in their citation so I'm writing ' <b>who is this a quote from</b> ' (.) big question mark
2:25	I'm correcting some grammar here (.) this is about Impressionism (.) and experience of the city and they haven't capitalised [enunciated very slowly and clearly] Impressionism
2:50	ok so the first web link comes up already now er which is to the phrase X which is clearly just lifted off a website it is cited so it's not erm poorly cited it's just not filling me with joy that they've just read a website
3:25	ok it's a little bit better than I'd feared (.) they got the right Bonaparte... ok that's fine
3:40	oh dear 'installs himself as Emperor in 1951' ' <b>check (.) your (.) dates</b> ' I have written (.) a hundred years out
4:07	oh dear [sighs] they're now citing an author who (.) wouldn't even have been a twinkling in his daddy's eye when in 1935 yet he'd apparently written a book (.) then (.) ' <b>Author not born then</b> ' [underlines his words?]

4:42	ok they've got the basic point about geometry (.) cleanliness (.) clean streets they get a tick for that
4:57	oh::: my:: what a good one to choose (.) now I'm getting people citing their lecture notes (.) [tuts] er ' <b>not really a source to be cited</b> ' (.) <b>use published sources'</b> (.) quite poor practice for second years (.) you do sometimes see first years doing it (.) er just stuff they've jotted down when you've been rambling on about something and it comes back to haunt you (.) as this one just has
6:42	ok so there's some repetition here now talking again about hot water systems this is the third paragraph making the same point
7:25	ok there's a classic mistake here (.) the key character in all of these essays is Historical Figure and they've spelled [slowing down speech] his name wrong (.) which means they quite possibly have not been reading about him (.) yet trying to pass off to me that they have
8:26	stylistically it's interesting all of the (.) quotations are italicised for some strange reason (.) and they're still getting the dates wrong: 'Book' published in [enunciated very clearly] 1935 apparently (.) one of the world's earliest e-books then is ↑it
9:45	[sighs] oh dear (.) ok here there's just some misunderstanding about what the reconstruction efforts were about



10:30	and they're misspelling the word 'cited' throughout spelling it with an s (.) I realise people's spelling is (.) variable and I'm not actually deducting any marks for this erm but one thing it does demonstrate to me quite clearly (.) is that they're not reading enough because (.) if they were they would know how to spell the word cited as in 'cited in work elsewhere' they'd know how to do it and (.) they don't
11:15	and the content of the paper itself is not leading to contradiction (.) erm or contradicting my view
12:08	ok so finished reading this one now [pages turning] [exhales loudly] unbelievable (.) apparently Author wrote <b>two</b> books in 1935 (.) [pages turning]

\* Time given indicates when transcribed words started. A long pause separates each entry. No words on the recording have been omitted.

Written on the feedback sheet:

*Your essay has many of the right ingredients. However, your discussion fails to really lift off and offer a sense of evaluation, or really get to grips with the art work which you have chosen. Your use of Harvard referencing needs to be improved, especially the dates you are citing, as these are clearly wrong in many places.*

